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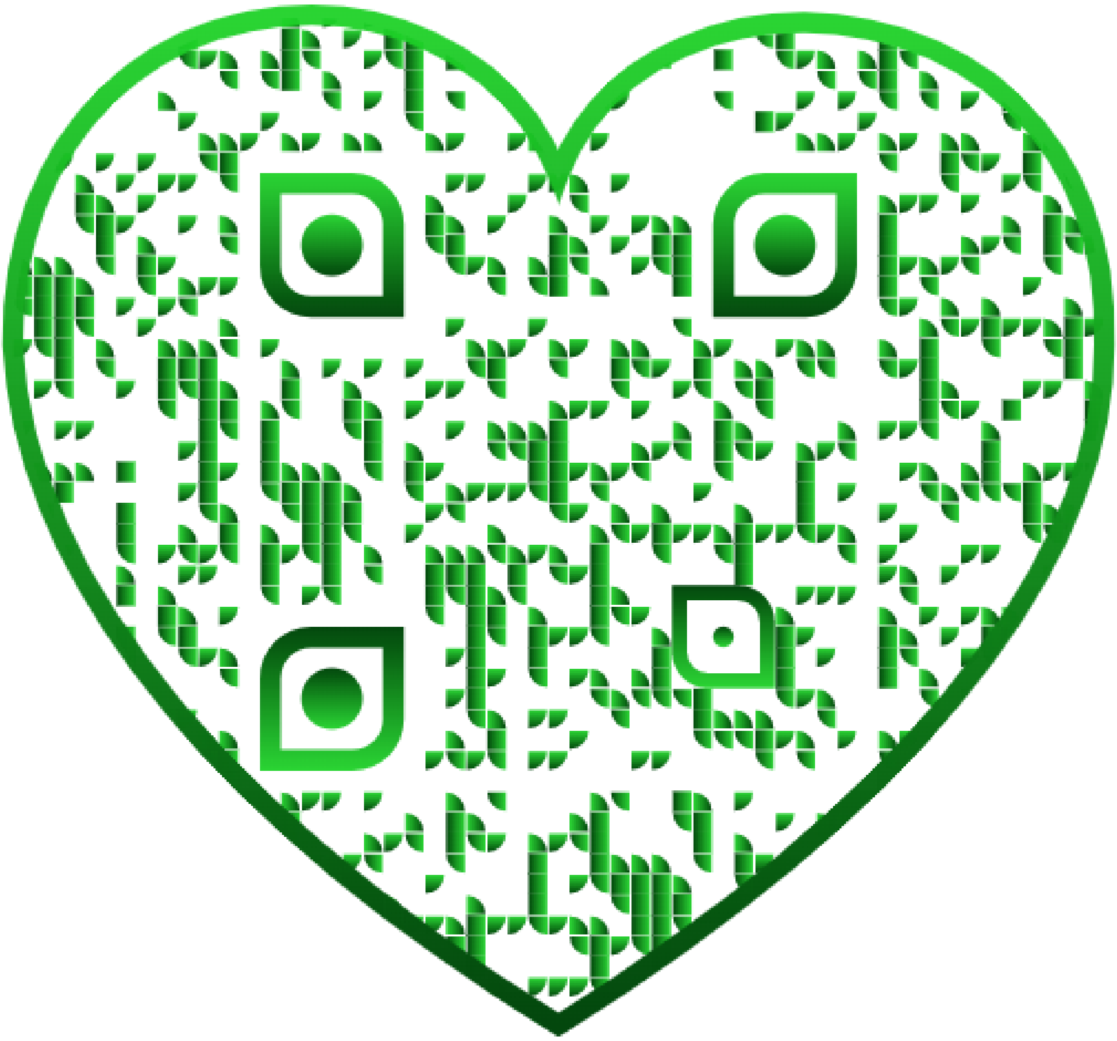

INSPIRATION DOORS

www.inspirationdoors.co.uk

Welcome

We are fast approaching our next Build It Live show – taking place at Bicester Motion in Oxfordshire on 7th & 8th June. I have to say, I genuinely love being part of these events, as do our crack team of self build and renovation specialists. It's always immensely rewarding to join the panel at the Ask Our Experts area, where over the course of a weekend we take hundreds of appointments with our readers and show attendees. These one-to-one conversations not only represent your chance to pick the brains of our esteemed experts, but give us something back, too, as we get to make a real-time difference to the success of your projects.

In many ways, the shows are a microcosm of what we do across the various touchpoints we offer. The magazine, website and our Virtual Training sessions (buildit.co.uk/training) all follow the same ethos, namely to deliver focused, high-quality and real-world advice, to help make a positive contribution to self builders and renovators on the ground. So, you won't find us only presenting the benefits of a particular product, material or building approach; nor will you see us glossing over cost details or only referencing entry-level products in a bid to make things look cheaper than they really are. Our goal is deliver accurate, authoritative and accessible information that you can trust.

Happily, it's a mission we share with many of the suppliers and trades who live and breathe bespoke construction. You can meet hundreds of self build-friendly companies at the Build It Live shows (see page 34 for a free ticket offer), and you'll find they offer a deep well of knowledge that spans far beyond their own products. So, take the chance to lean on them – that's exactly what I'm doing on my own renovation right now!

Chris

CHRIS BATESMITH, CONTENT DIRECTOR

EDITOR'S FAVOURITE FEATURES

19

LOW-COST SELF BUILD HOMES

Building a house from scratch is the perfect way to create a bespoke property tailored to your individual lifestyle – but what's possible with a more limited budget? Sander Tel rounds up a collection of value-for-money projects and speaks to the experts about how to finance a scheme

76

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO LOFT CONVERSIONS

Looking to create additional rooms without eating into precious garden space? A loft conversion could be your best bet, says Kate Sandhu. Here are the key factors to consider for a successful project from start to finish

COVER IMAGE: A STRIKING EXTENSION FEATURING IDSYSTEMS' GLAZED DOORS (PAGE 73). PHOTO: CHRIS TAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY

MEET THE TEAM

SANDER TEL is Build It's digital features editor. As well as creating great content on www.self-build.co.uk, this issue he's looking at some stunning low-cost self build projects (page 19).

SCARLETT DEAMER is Build It's editorial assistant. From page 9, she's sourcing the latest news, products and materials. On page 58, she looks at the benefits of oak frame construction.

KATE SANDHU is a renovation expert, with a deep knowledge of project management. This month she's exploring the benefits of transforming your home with a loft conversion (page 76).

MARK STEVENSON has years of experience in the construction industry and is the current chair of NaCSBA. On page 100, he investigates what mortgage options are available for renovations.

JULIAN OWEN is Build It's design doctor and a self build architect with his own practice. Discover how to effectively collaborate with architects with his expert guide on page 86.

JULIA RIDDLE is a planning consultant with a wealth of experience in self and custom building, and a regular at Build It Live. She shares how to get consent on brownfield plots on page 92.

ALAN TIERNEY is a historic buildings expert and conservation specialist. For advice on your heritage project, speak to him at Build It Live or check out his articles at www.self-build.co.uk/alan

MARTIN GAINE is a former council case officer turned independent planning consultant, and a regular expert at Build It Live. Read Martin's planning guides at self-build.co.uk/martin

NIGEL GRIFFITHS is Build It's sustainability expert, specialising in eco homes and renewable energy. See page 94 where he explores the different methods for creating a more sustainable garden.

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Build It AWARDS 2024 WINNER Best Oak Frame Home

Discover more about Paul and Mandy's *self-build story*

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REAL-LIFE HOMES

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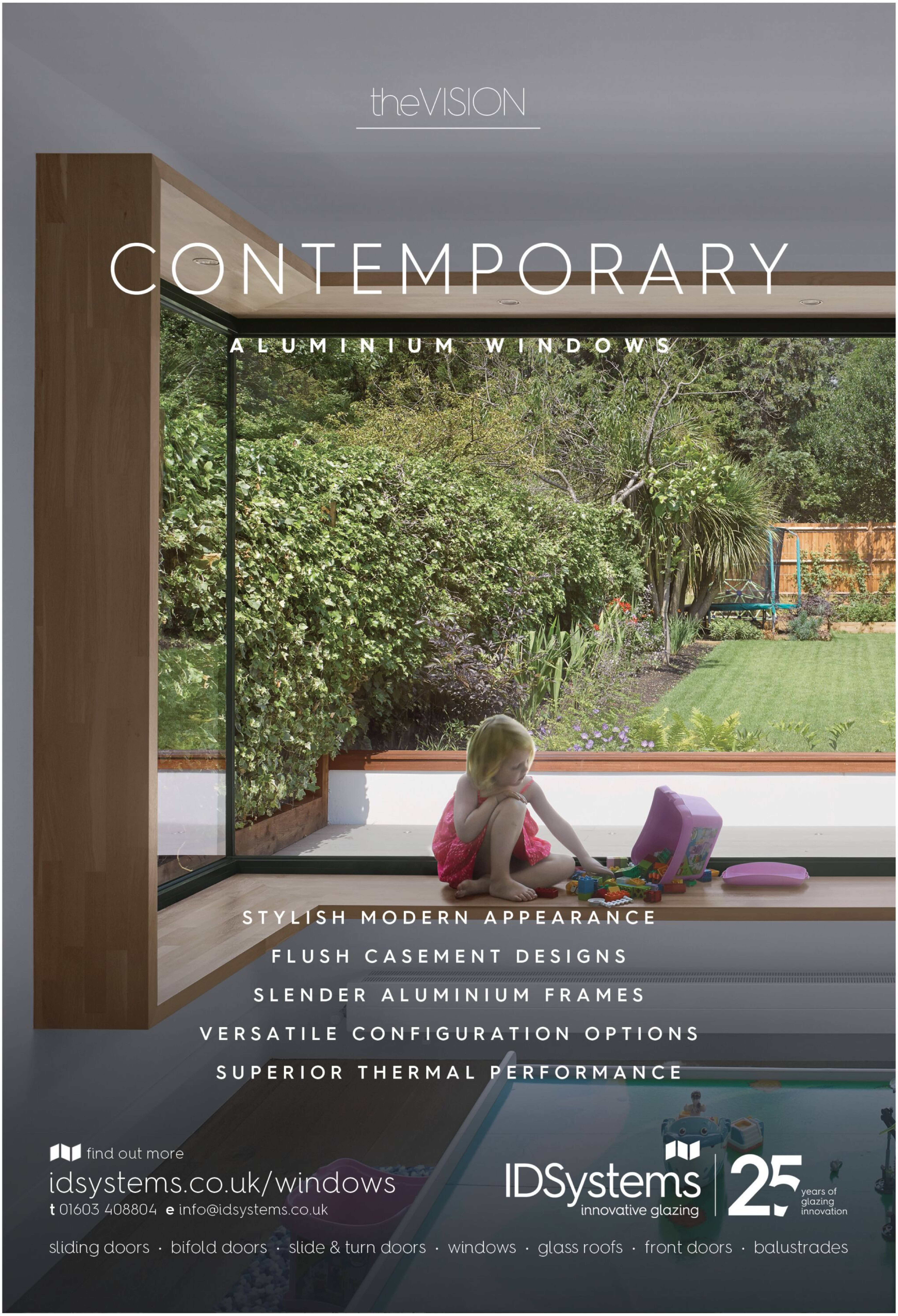
Mulroy Architects / Will Pryce Photography



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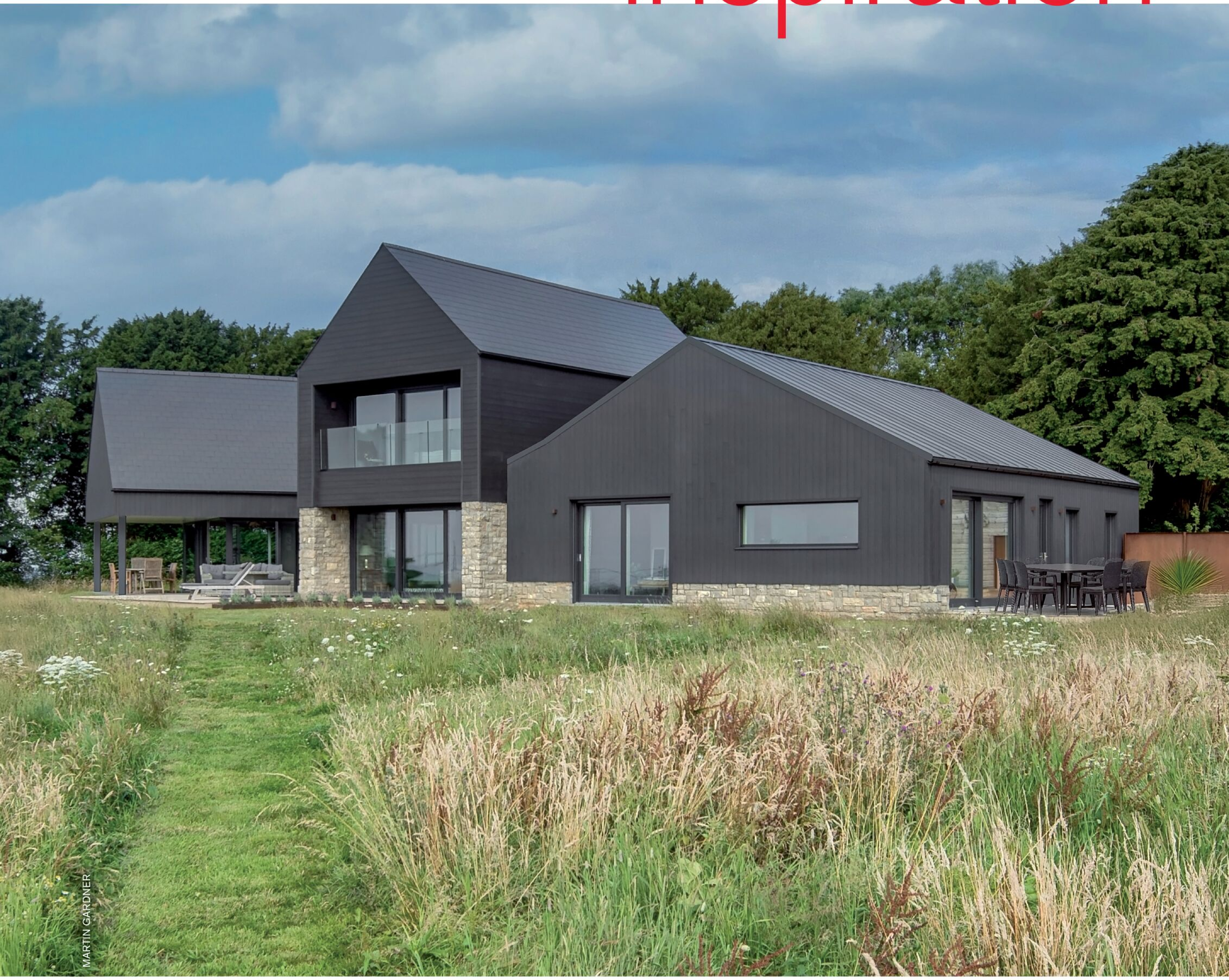

MARTIN GARDNER

Future-proof South Downs build

Nestled on a secluded hill in Portsmouth, AR Design Studio has created this striking, three-bedroom self build. The site previously housed a small collection of quaint agricultural structures, which had since fallen into disrepair. Choosing the spot because of the awe-inspiring vistas, the homeowners wanted not only a spacious family home, but one that could age with them.

The design comprises of four pitched volumes that mirror traditional farm structures. To the east and west, low, single-storey wings resemble typical cowsheds and house a garage, gym, two ensuite bedrooms and practical utility spaces. The central hub consists of a two-storey living room with a cosy snug, a luxurious master bedroom and a large open-plan kitchen, dining and sitting area. The entire layout was designed to enhance accessibility and ensure the home is future-proof. All the key living areas are thoughtfully arranged on a single level.

Light and space are central to this project's success, achieved through expansive glazing throughout, flooding the home with sunlight. The four structures are arranged to capture panoramic views, and a glazed link has been cleverly incorporated to unify the buildings and frame a breathtaking sightline of the rolling hills.

Sleek, black timber cladding has been paired with rustic stone accents at the base of each structure. The contrasting materials create a dynamic, contemporary exterior that also reinforces the home's connection to its rural landscape and historic usage.

To find out more call 01962 864545 or visit ardesignstudio.co.uk

PROJECT OF THE MONTH

Modernist Townhouse

by Studio Hagen Hall

This 1960s terraced house, located in North London's Hampstead Conservation Area, has been transformed into a modern family home by Studio Haden Hall. The owners aimed to improve the property's energy efficiency and adapt it for their growing family – without compromising the mid-century charm that initially drew them to it.

A new broken-plan layout helps define zones for rest, utility, work and play. The kitchen and living areas are now more logically connected, and additional storage has been incorporated to boost practicality.

The interior design draws inspiration from the home's original features, such as the aged Parana pine stairwell and timber-clad ceilings. The joinery has been subtly stained to match the existing woodwork and a deep, rich green colour palette unifies the spaces throughout.

Internal insulation has been added to concrete and brick walls to reduce cold bridging, and air quality is managed through a combination of a mechanical extract ventilation system and trickle vents in every room

The home's sustainability has also improved with the addition of integrated solar panels and an air source heat pump – elevating both comfort and eco-credentials.

For more information call 07774 466244 or visit studiohagenhall.com

FELIX SPELLER

More want multi-generational homes

A survey by Stiltz Home Lifts has shown that more than half of UK adults are open to living in multi-generational households, due in part to rising living costs and the growing desire to be able to support ageing relatives for longer. A poll of 1,000 UK-based homeowners aged between 35-54 showed that 8.3% would consider adapting their home if a relative was to move in, while 41% said that they would be more inclined to ask an elderly family member to move in with them to avoid rising care home costs.

57,000

Certified rooftop solar PV installations were recorded in the UK during the first three months of 2025, according to data from the Microgeneration Certification Scheme. This is the highest volume of first-quarter installs since 2012, with over one-third of systems being placed on new builds. The government is expected to announce that solar panels will be required on all new build home from 2027, as part of its revisions to the upcoming Future Homes Standard.

Government permits woodburning stoves

The UK government has confirmed that woodburners will continue to be allowed in new homes, following a joint letter from the Stove Industry Association (SIA) and over 1,500 supporting businesses. Under the proposed Future Homes Standard, these stoves can serve as secondary heating sources within properties. The SIA has understandably welcomed the decision, highlighting the environmental benefits of modern stoves, including their low-carbon credentials and improved energy efficiency.

What's on?

NSBRC MARKET DAY

13th JUNE
FREE, SWINDON

Take your questions to experts at the National Self Build & Renovation Centre for valuable in-person advice.

nsbrc.co.uk

GARDENING FOR NATURE

21st JUNE
£125, POWYS

Brush up on your gardening skills and explore ways to make your outdoor space into a wildlife haven.

cat.org.uk

DIY IN A DAY: ELECTRICS

28th JUNE
£210, LONDON

Get to grips with the basics, from changing ceiling pendants to testing for faulty wiring at this hands-on workshop.

thegoodlifecentre.co.uk

GUIDE TO SELF BUILD PROJECTS

11th-13th JULY
£395, SWINDON

From planning to eco design, this three-day course covers the ins and outs of running a self build scheme.

nsbrc.co.uk

OAKWRIGHTS OPEN DAY

18th JULY
FREE, SOMERSET

Take a look around a real-life oak frame build and discuss your plans with the Oakwrights design team.

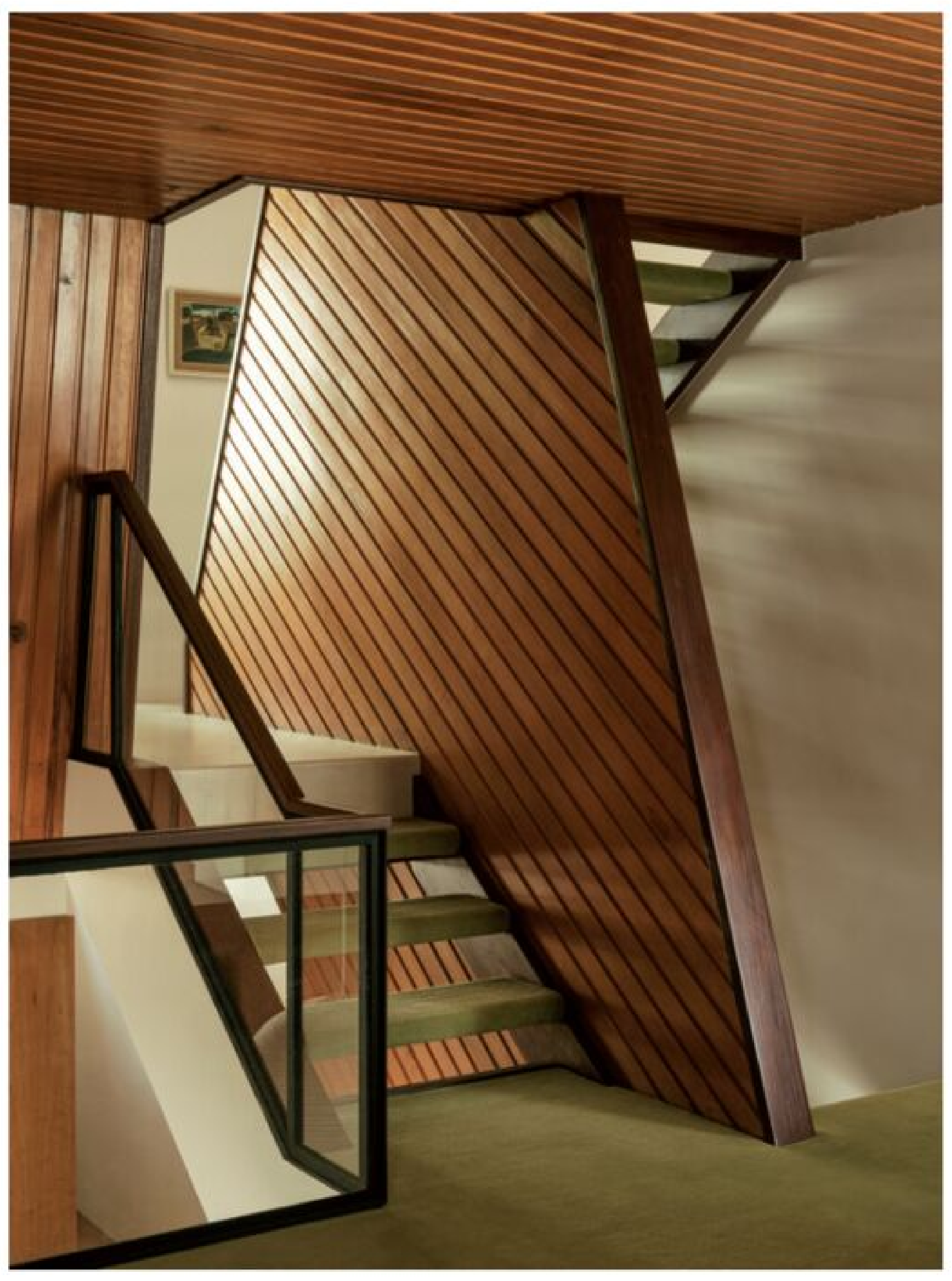
oakwrights.co.uk

KITCHEN FITTING

28th-29th JULY
£275, CROYDON

Install your own kitchen to a professional standard with the help of expert instructions on this two-day intensive course.

thebtc.co.uk



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need to know

When do I need a structural engineer?

If you're planning alterations to your home – such as opening up a kitchen, converting a loft or building an extension – it's likely that you will need the expertise of a structural engineer. Our primary role is to help ensure that your proposed works will be not only structurally sound, but importantly will meet the requirements of Part A (Structure) of the Building Regulations.

Structural engineers work closely with designers to ensure your ideas are not just creative, but are buildable. You'll typically need input from an engineer if you're removing load-bearing walls, creating large openings, extending or creating a new build home. Engineers are also able to assist if you notice any signs of structural distress, such as cracks or sagging in any walls or beams.

It's advisable to engage a structural engineer once you have a good draft of your architectural plans in place. Early engagement can help to identify any potential structural challenges before they become costly or particularly complex to resolve. Acknowledging these issues means we can help refine your designs and ensure you're not over-engineering or missing critical details.

On many different projects, structural calculations will usually be required to ensure compliance with Part A of the Building regulations. Your engineer will produce the necessary drawings and calculations for submission, forming a key part of your overall application.

Fees for a structural engineer vary depending on the complexity of the project. For small works, such as loft conversions or internal alterations, you might typically expect to pay around £1,000 - £2,000. Larger or more involved projects, such as full new builds or basements, can cost anywhere from £3,000 to £15,000+ depending on the scale and scope. Some engineers will work on a fixed-fee basis, while others will charge you by the hour. I would always recommend requesting a clear, itemised fee proposal at the outset, so you understand exactly what's included and can budget accordingly.

During the construction phase, your engineer may remain involved to respond to any queries, assess site conditions and ensure that the structure is being built as per the proposed plans. While this may not be necessary for straightforward projects, it's often invaluable for more challenging builds where unforeseen conditions can spring up as your team gets to work on site.

When searching for a structural engineer, look for someone who is a Chartered Civil or Structural Engineer (CEng MICE or CEng MIStructE) with relevant residential experience and professional indemnity insurance. It's also beneficial to work with someone who can provide ongoing support during construction – whether through phone calls, online meetings or site visits, if needed. Personal recommendations from your designer or contractor, especially local contacts, are often a great starting point.

JOEL SANDERS

is a chartered engineer with the Institution of Civil Engineers. He has over 20 year's experience within the Civil and Structural Engineering sector, specialising in residential and industrial civil and structural design. He also advocates for safer build conditions. For more information visit **qapm.com**

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£588 per m²

Made from over 90% quartz, this marble-effect countertop is scratch and stain resistant, making it ideal for hard-working kitchens. It's excellent for longer runs as it requires minimal joints compared to sintered stone. **KonigQuartz worktop in Bianco Isola 20mm, £588 per m², konigstone.co.uk**

From £120

Featuring neutral grey tones with intricate veining, this design replicates real marble worktops. Antibacterial surface protection is built into the laminate, while matching splashbacks are also available to complete the look. **Omega surface in Picasso Marble, from £120 (3m x 0.6m x 0.022m), bushboard.co.uk**

product news

Great shopping ideas for your custom home project

COMPOSITE FENCING

Easy to install and weather resistant, this garden panelling combines style with practical durability. Its reversible design features a natural woodgrain texture on one side and a sleek brushed finish on the other. **LuxeLine reversible fencing, from £99.95, wallsandfloors.co.uk**

SMART EV CHARGING

This compact EV charger is available in 100 colour combinations. It's available as either a socketed unit (so you can use your own cable) or with tethered cable, for added convenience. Choose from a 7kW single-phase or 22kW three-phase model. **Andersen Quartz charging unit, £1,105 including installation, andersen-ev.com**

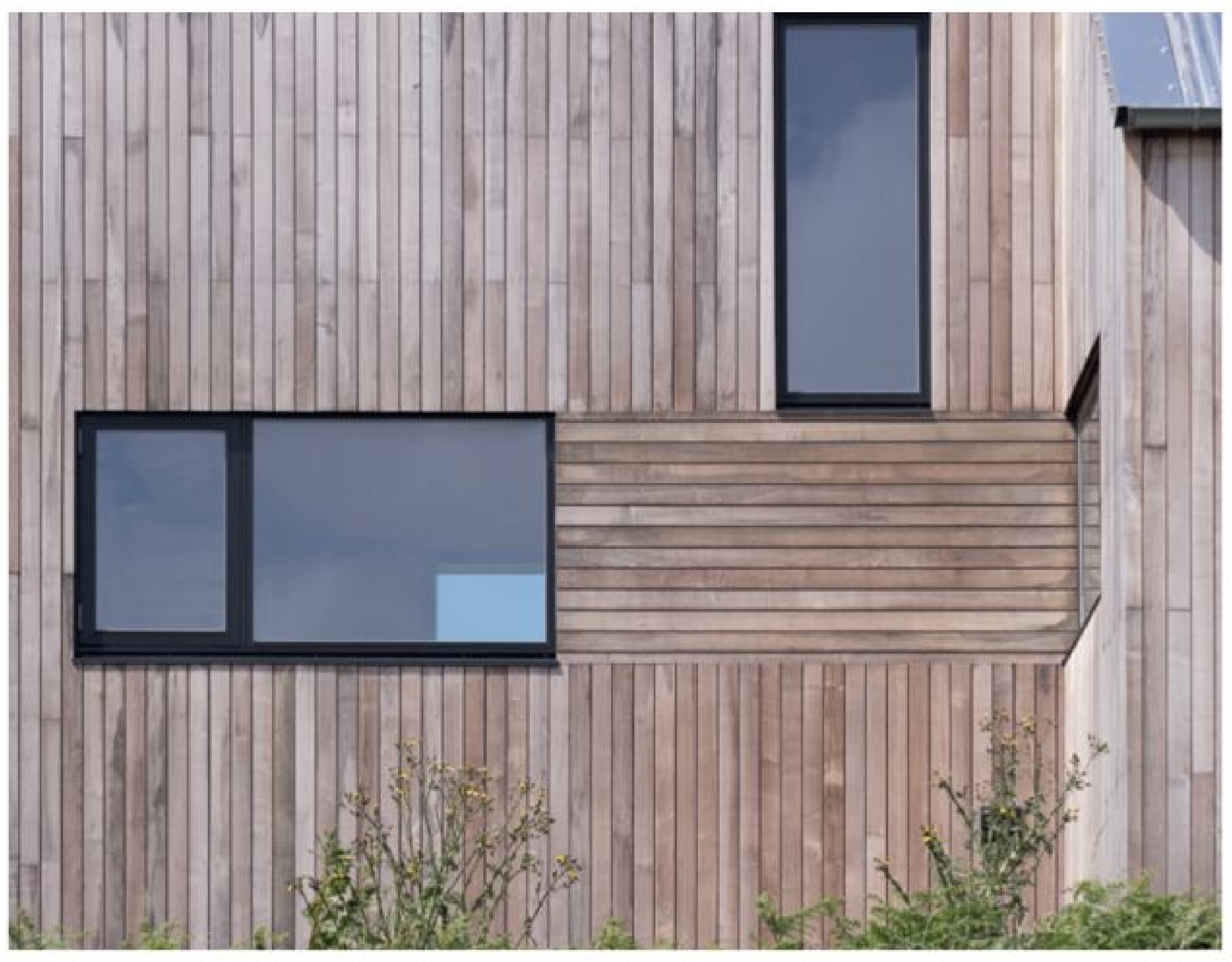
HOME SECURITY CAMERA

EZVIZ's new all-day-recording outdoor battery camera provides 24/7 images without rapidly draining the battery. It picks up activity from up to 25m away, sending alerts instantly to ensure no moment is missed. An optional solar panel is available to charge the unit. **EZVIZ CB3 AOV, from £47.99, ezviz.com**

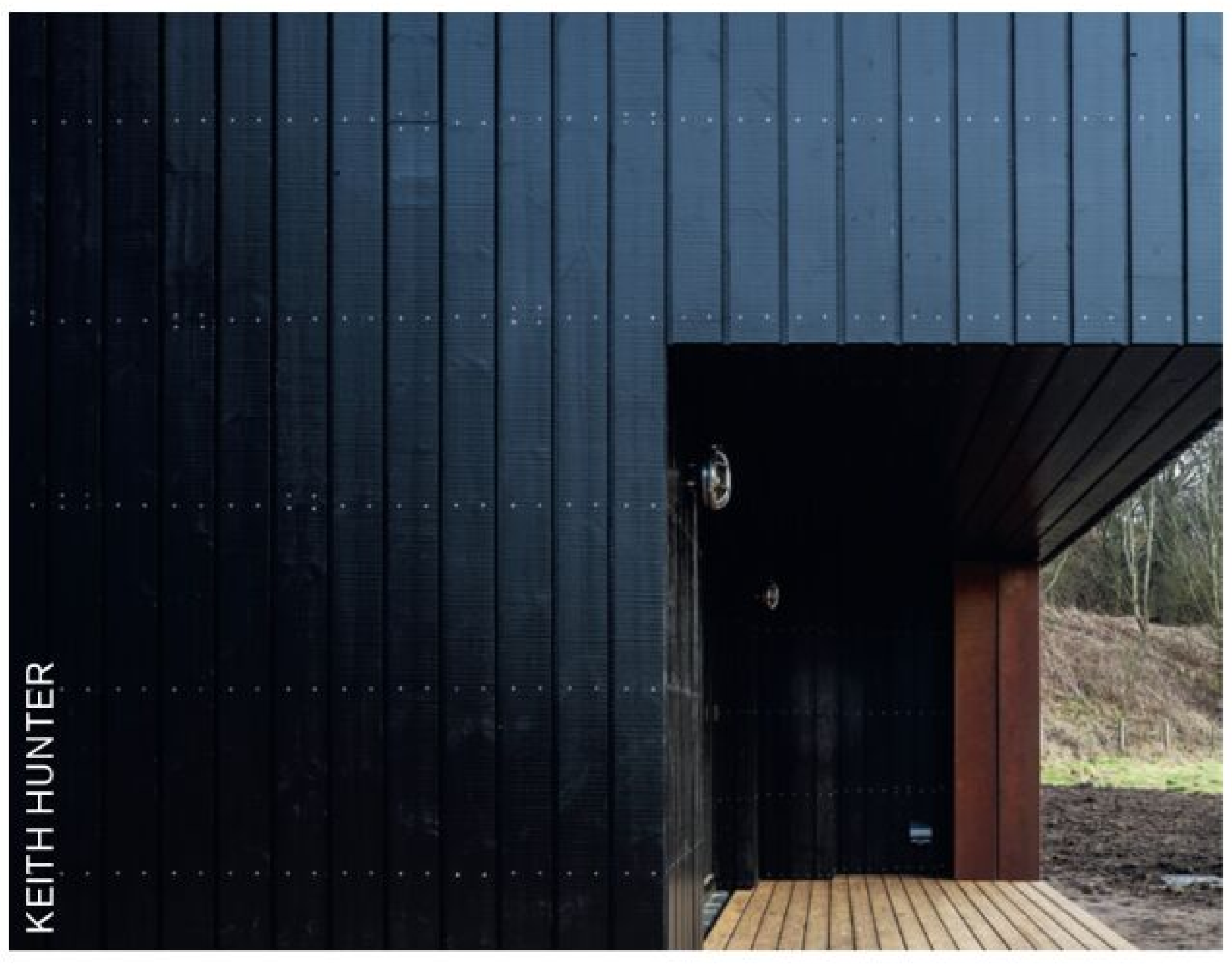
SLEEK SHOWER FLOOR

This elegant shower system brings style, performance and durability to your bathroom. A built-in gradient minimises pooling, while its flush finish eliminates any external raised edge, creating a seamless transition. **Continental Linear Shower Floor, from £457.20, matki.co.uk**

3 of the best EXTERIOR TIMBER CLADDING

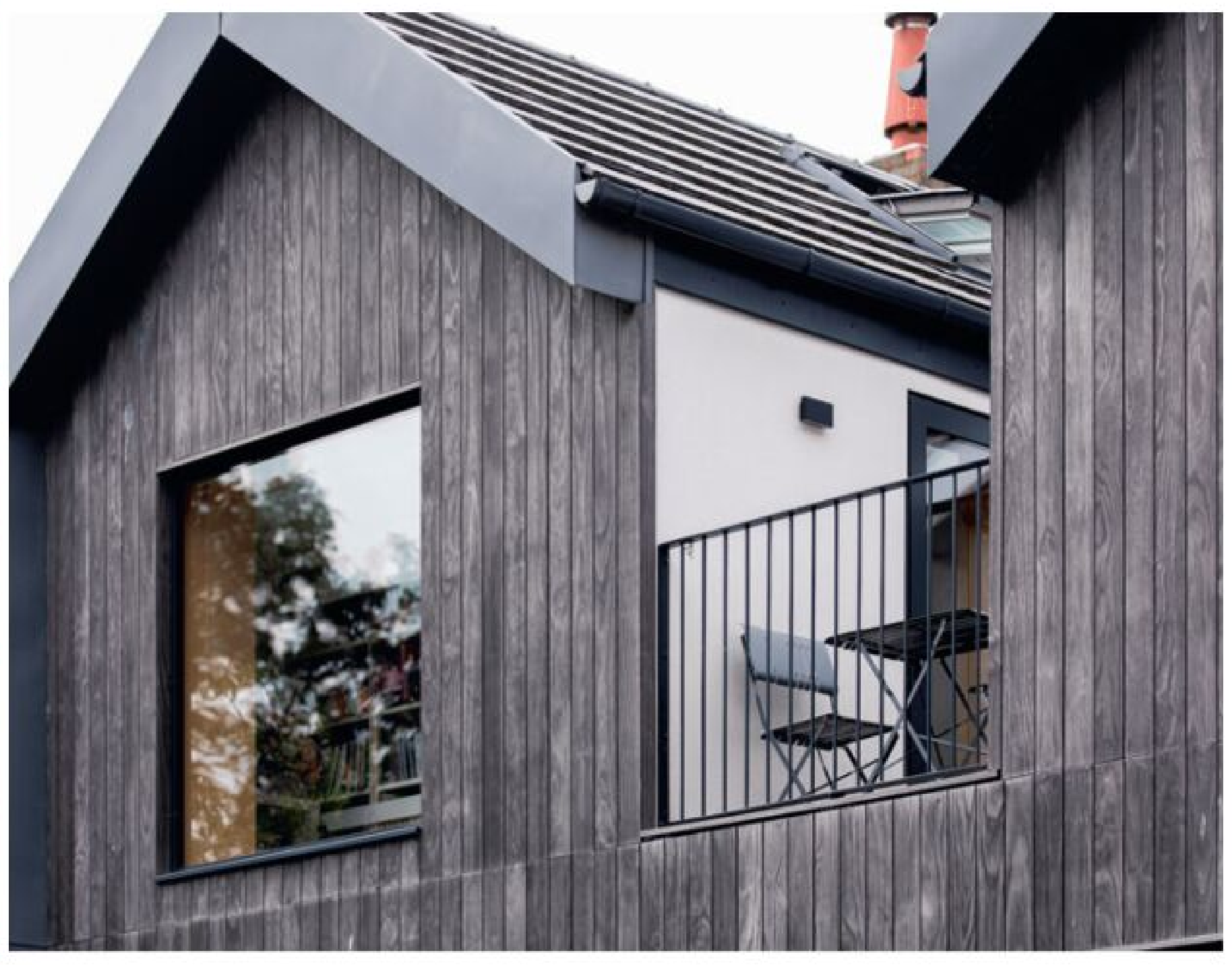


1 *Brimstone hardwood cladding in Ash finish,* **£91.20 per m², vastern.co.uk**



KEITH HUNTER

2 *Kurowood barred effect cladding,* **from £74.40 per m², russwood.co.uk**



3 *Accoya Colour Grey pre-coloured cladding,* **from £99 per m², millworks.co.uk**

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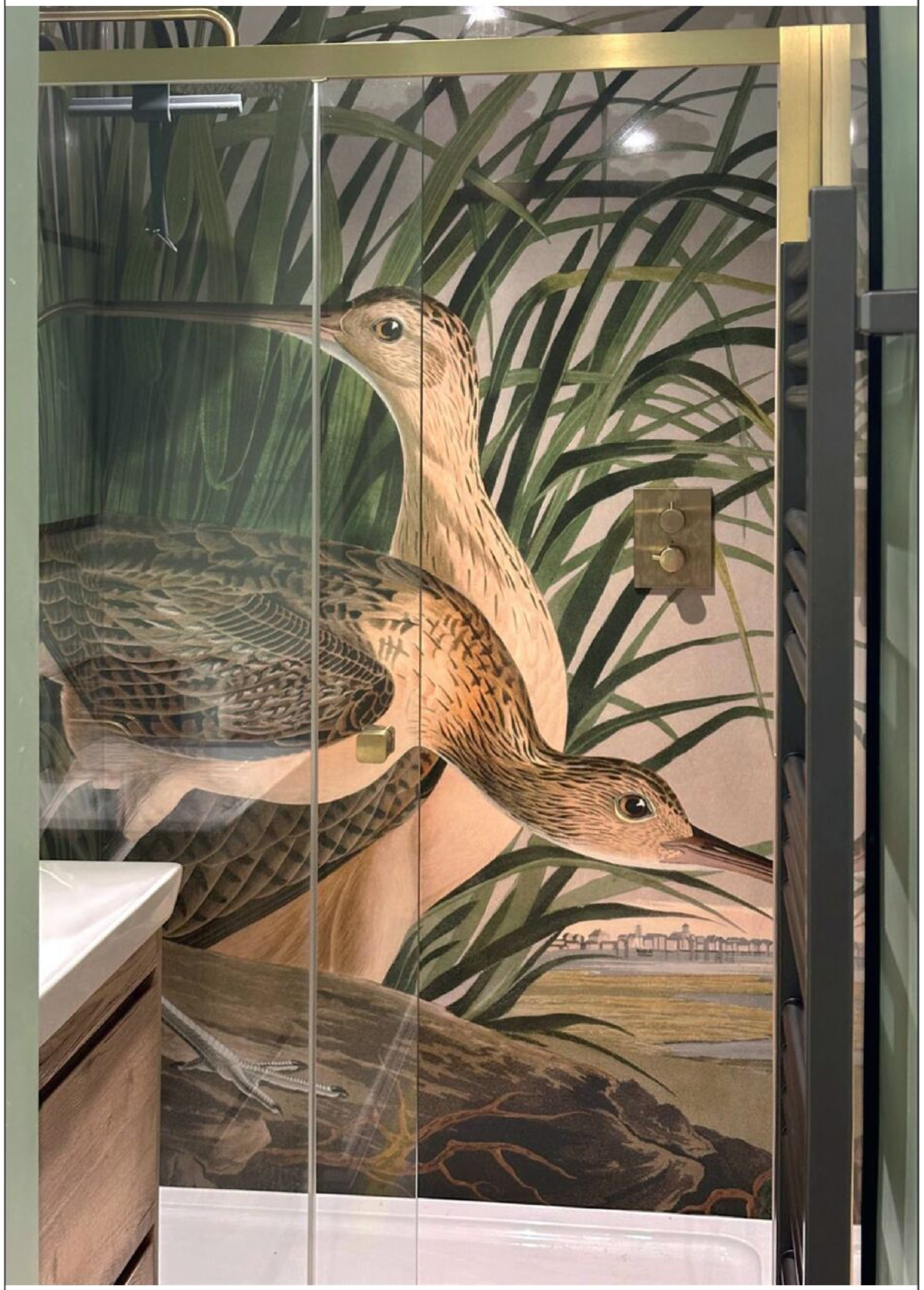

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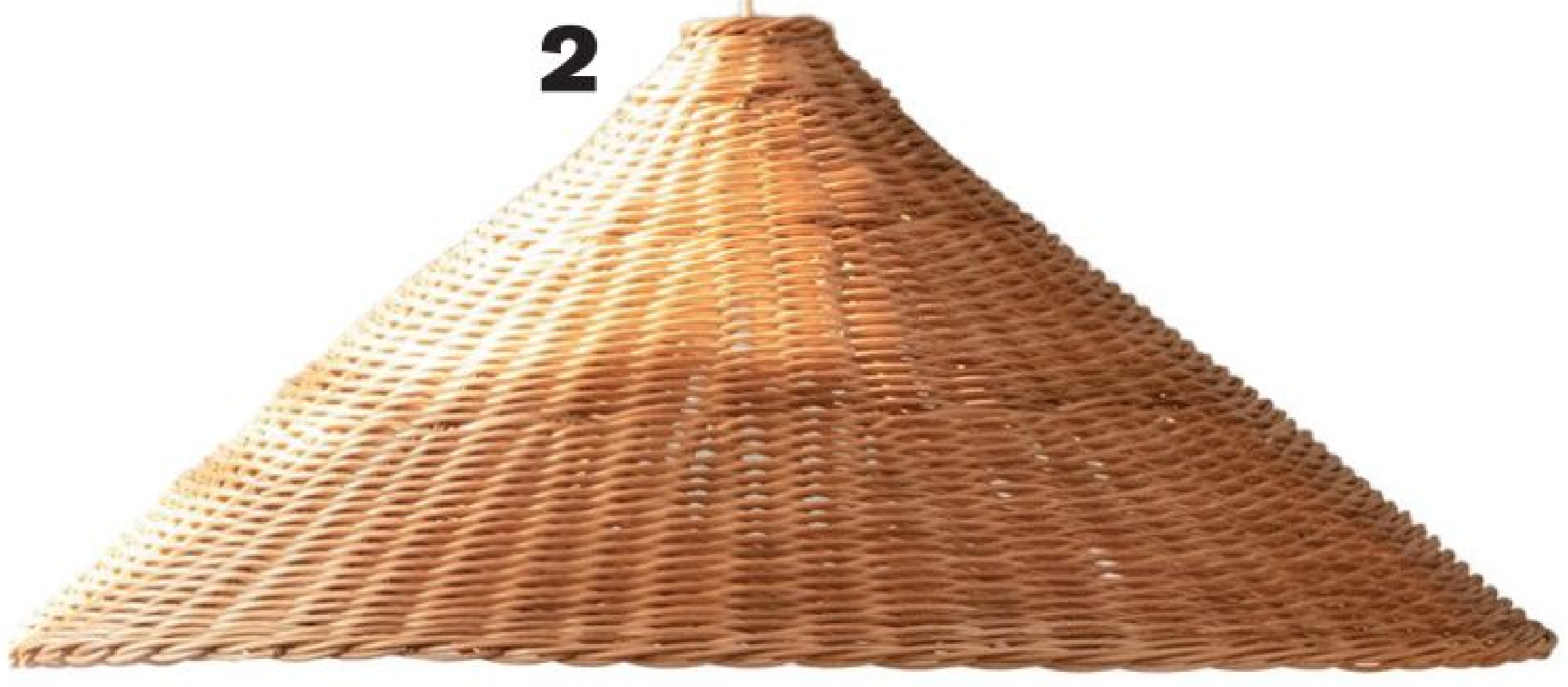
interiors notebook

Weave some rustic charm into your home's aesthetic with these stylish rattan features



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Shopping list

1 *Enhance your living space with this timeless, two-tiered coffee table. Individually hand-woven in Indonesia, the frames are wrapped in rattan, creating a lovely textured finish. A side table option is also available to complete the look.* **Cartmel table, £425, thewhitecompany.com**

2 *With a statement cone shaped design, this delightful lampshade is sure to add wow hanging over a dining table or kitchen island. The material makes the light produce distinctive patterns and shadows, adding visual interest.* **Ferm Dou lampshade, £175, abodeliving.co.uk**

3 *Maximise your storage with this bohemian-style cabinet. Made up of a range of multi-level shelves and cupboards, you can use it in a whole host of ways – be that as a practical prep station, coffee corner or a mini in-home bar.* **Frances kitchen cabinet in Natural, £229.99, daals.co.uk**

4 *Perfectly complementing the rattan look, this hand braided and stitched jute rug's durability makes it an excellent choice for high-traffic zones. Its chic oval shape helps make a space look larger, while its natural hues add a beautiful warm tone to your home.* **Dahlia oval rug, £139, cultfurniture.com**

5 *With its solid wood frame, cane-panelled arms and cosy neutral-hued cushion, this armchair fits beautifully in a rattan-inspired scheme. The slanted backrest and extra-wide seat offer exceptional comfort, providing the ideal spot to unwind.* **Mandar chair in Beige, £109.99, wayfair.co.uk**

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LYNN PALMER
Build It AWARDS

ASK OUR EXPERTS

TOP TIPS FINDING LAND
1. Finding plots is easy – being prepared to make the compromise is really hard
2. Don't fall in love with a particular style of house
3. Look out for replacement dwellings, garden grabs and brownfield land
4. Check your Local Authority planning website every week
5. Network, network, network and advertise
6. Pay a finders fee!
7. Search using maps
DEFRA Magic maps, planning websites
Google, Bing etc...
Ordnance survey
8. Contact businesses making planning applications
9. Stop looking at fields outside settlements
10. Look out for Custom build opportunities
11. Buy at auction
12. If it looks too good
Build It Live

Build It Live gives you first-hand experience of how products and materials look and feel, while connecting you with experts to help guide the specification choices for your project. If you're self building, renovating or have a home improvement in the pipeline, then join Build It's knowledgeable team as well as hundreds of trusted suppliers at our next Build It Live exhibition, which takes place at Bicester Motion in Oxfordshire, on 7th & 8th June. Alongside the chance to see and touch 1,000s of products and materials, Build It Live offers a wealth of free expert seminars, workshops and live demonstrations, designed to help you achieve project success. Here's a taster of what's in store:

Ask Our Experts

Build It's experts will be available all weekend to offer FREE, impartial advice on every aspect of your self build, renovation or extension – no sales pitch, just expert guidance! Don't miss this chance to benefit from the knowledge and experience of professional project managers, planners, architects, sustainability specialists, and more. Their independent advice could save you thousands in consultancy fees! Bring along your plans, ideas and questions – get there early to secure your one-on-one appointment.

FREE & IMPARTIAL PROJECT ADVICE!

Build Cost Clinic

Looking to get a handle on budgeting for your self build, renovation, or extension project? Visit the Build Cost Clinic to book an initial consultation with a qualified and experienced estimator. They'll provide expert insights on the budget you need to bring your dream home to life. Using up-to-date materials and labour pricing, their advice will help you refine your design choices, better evaluate builders' quotes, and potentially save you money in the process!

Extensions Clinic

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Heating Advice Clinic

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LOW-COST SELF BUILD HOMES

Building a house from scratch is the perfect way to create a bespoke property tailored to your individual lifestyle – but what's possible with a more limited budget? Sander Tel rounds up a collection of value-for-money projects and speaks to the experts about how to finance a scheme

LAYING LOW

Situated on a large backland plot in south Oxfordshire, this sympathetic, single-storey self build – designed by Trace Architects – sits perfectly against its verdant backdrop. The house was created in just four sections using structural insulated panels (SIPs) for maximum efficiency and speed of construction. This helped to ensure minimal time on site erecting the superstructure. Built for **£300,000**, the house's design scheme embraces sustainable materials, with recycled kitchen and bathroom joinery, a charred timber-clad exterior, and large swathes of glazing to maximise solar gain and ensure a light-filled house throughout all seasons. **(tracearchitects.format.com)**

PACKAGE DEAL

Designed by the homeowners in collaboration with Scandinavian Homes, this 1.5-storey, chalet-style project won the 2024 Build It Award for Best Self Build Under £300k. The house features three bedrooms and a stunning full-height living area, complete with a glazed gable and galleried landing. Working with a limited budget, the family opted for a shell build project, using Scandinavian Homes' log kit. With the house wind and watertight, the owners took on the majority of the internal fit-out. Doing a lot of the work themselves helped the couple save a significant amount on their build costs, while ensuring each and every detail was finished to their exact requirements. **(www.scandinavianhomes.com)**

EXPERT VIEW FINANCING YOUR SELF BUILD PROJECT

TOM MCSHERRY, national business development manager at BuildStore, shares the inside track on the different self build finance options

Q What are self build mortgages and how do they differ from traditional finance options?

Unlike regular mortgages, which release a lump sum upfront, self build versions release funds in stages and are tailored specifically to your own project. A self build mortgage is typically released at the following stages: land purchase; foundations laid; roof structure complete (wind and watertight); internal works (first and second fix), and final completion. You only pay interest on the funds released, making this a cost-effective and practical way to finance your dream home.

Q What mortgage options are available for self builders?

- **Valuation-based stage payments**. Funds are released after each build stage, based on the property's value at that point. Whilst this is suitable for some projects, this method can create cash flow issues early in the scheme, particularly if you're using build systems such as timber frame, ICF, oak or SIPs, as they require payment upfront.
- **Guaranteed stage payments**. These offer fixed payments at each stage, regardless of value – ideal if you have a smaller deposit or need to cover upfront costs. Exclusive to BuildStore, guaranteed mortgages provide greater cost certainty and flexibility.
- **Advance stage payments**. Funds are paid before each stage of the project, useful for paying suppliers or ordering materials.
- **Arrears stage payments**. Funds are paid after each stage, helpful if you have some savings and want to maintain control.

Q How will your project route impact the type of mortgage you qualify for?

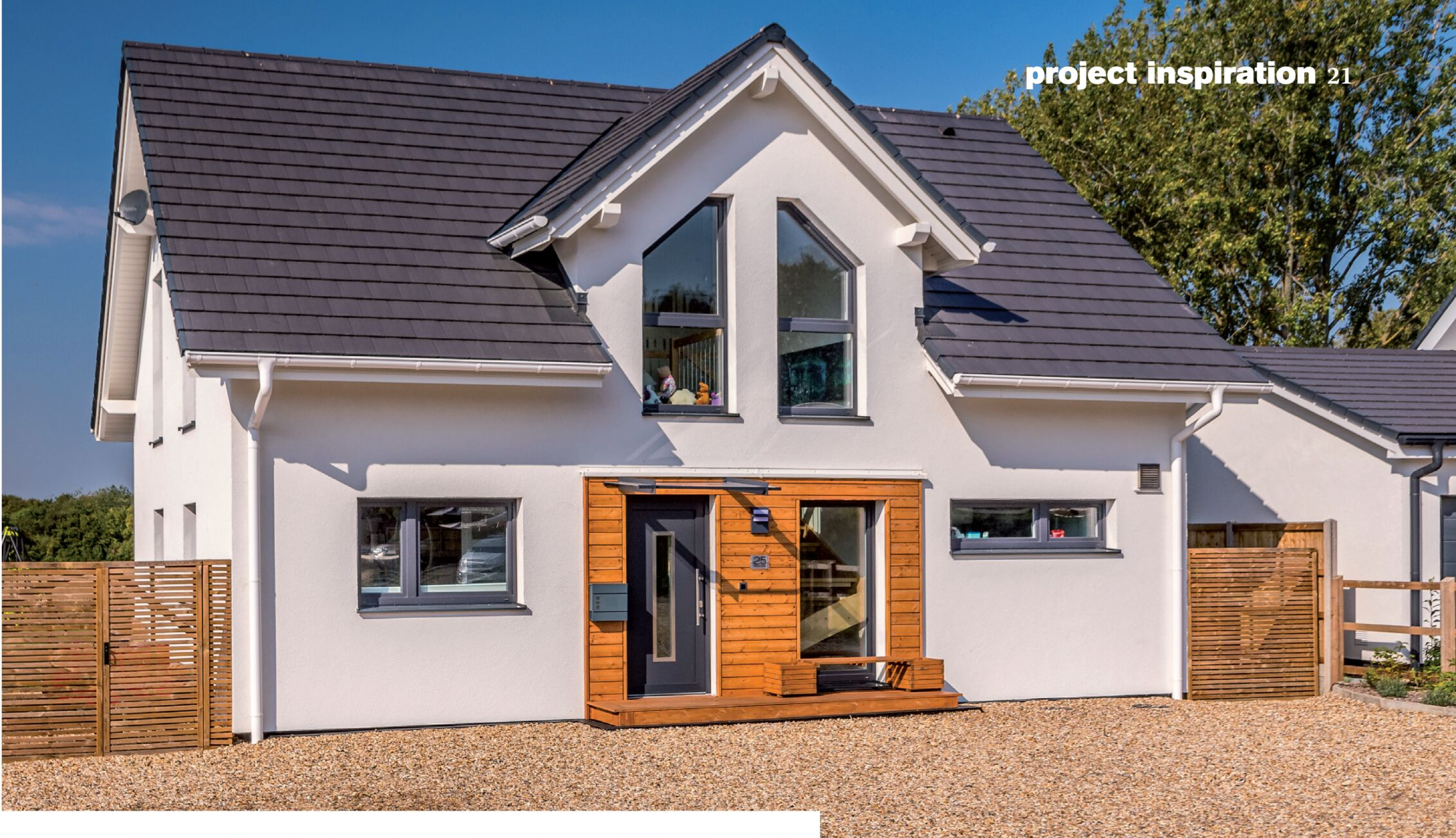
- **DIY or self-managed builds**. Managing your project's trades and materials deliveries yourself? Regular access to funding is vital for a smooth process.
- **Custom build**. Payments may be tied to developer contracts – guaranteed stage payments can help meet these terms.
- **Renovation or conversion**. Property value might drop before rising again, so a steady flow of funds is crucial.

Q Do you have any tips for securing the best self build mortgage?

- **Start early**. Speak to a broker before buying a plot of land or drawing up plans to establish your budget. Unless you're using a main contractor on a fixed price, include all costs, plus a contingency of between 10-20%.
- **Work with professionals**. A good team (architects, engineers, project managers and mortgage specialists) can help you avoid costly mistakes later on.
- **Use a specialist broker**. BuildStore offers exclusive mortgage products and full market access, plus exclusive access to products with deposits as low as 5% of the build costs.

Q Are there any common pitfalls that self builders should try and avoid?

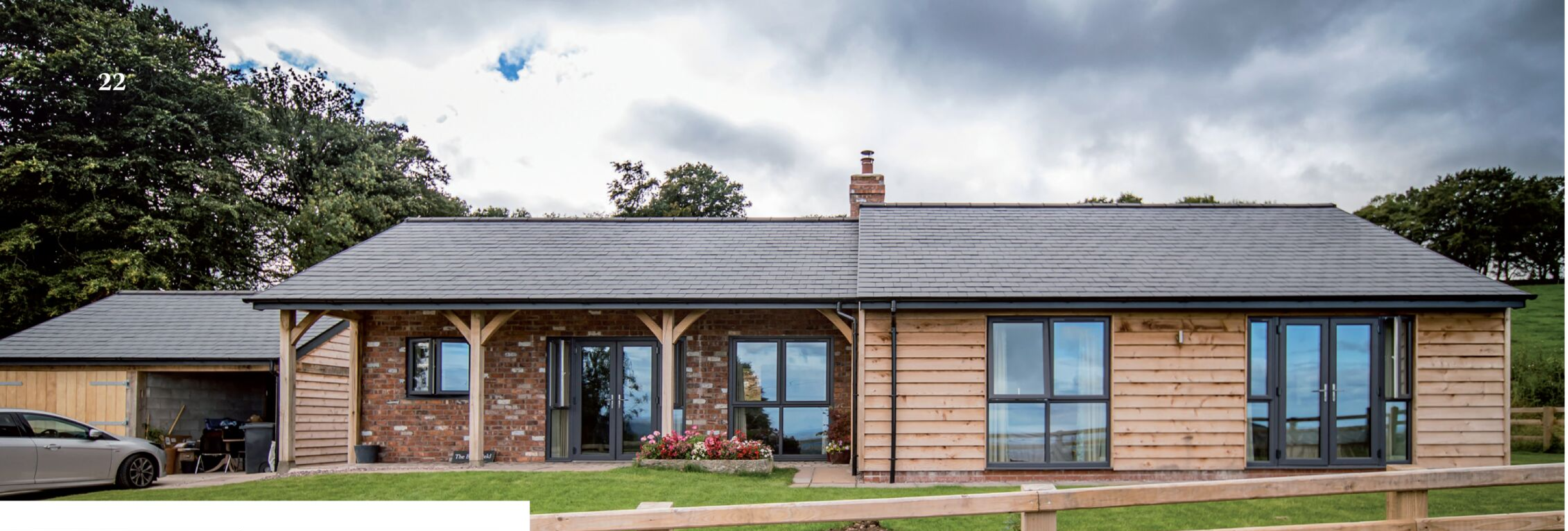
- **Missing professional fees** for planning, design, warranties etc.
- **Underestimating** upfront payment needs.
- **Designing beyond your budget** – set limits early on and design within them. Consider elements of the design that are essential.
- **Zoning in on interest rates**, when cash flow should in fact be the main focus.
- **Failing to work with** a mortgage specialist with access to all lenders and products.



HARRY VAN GORKUM

PERFECT HOME

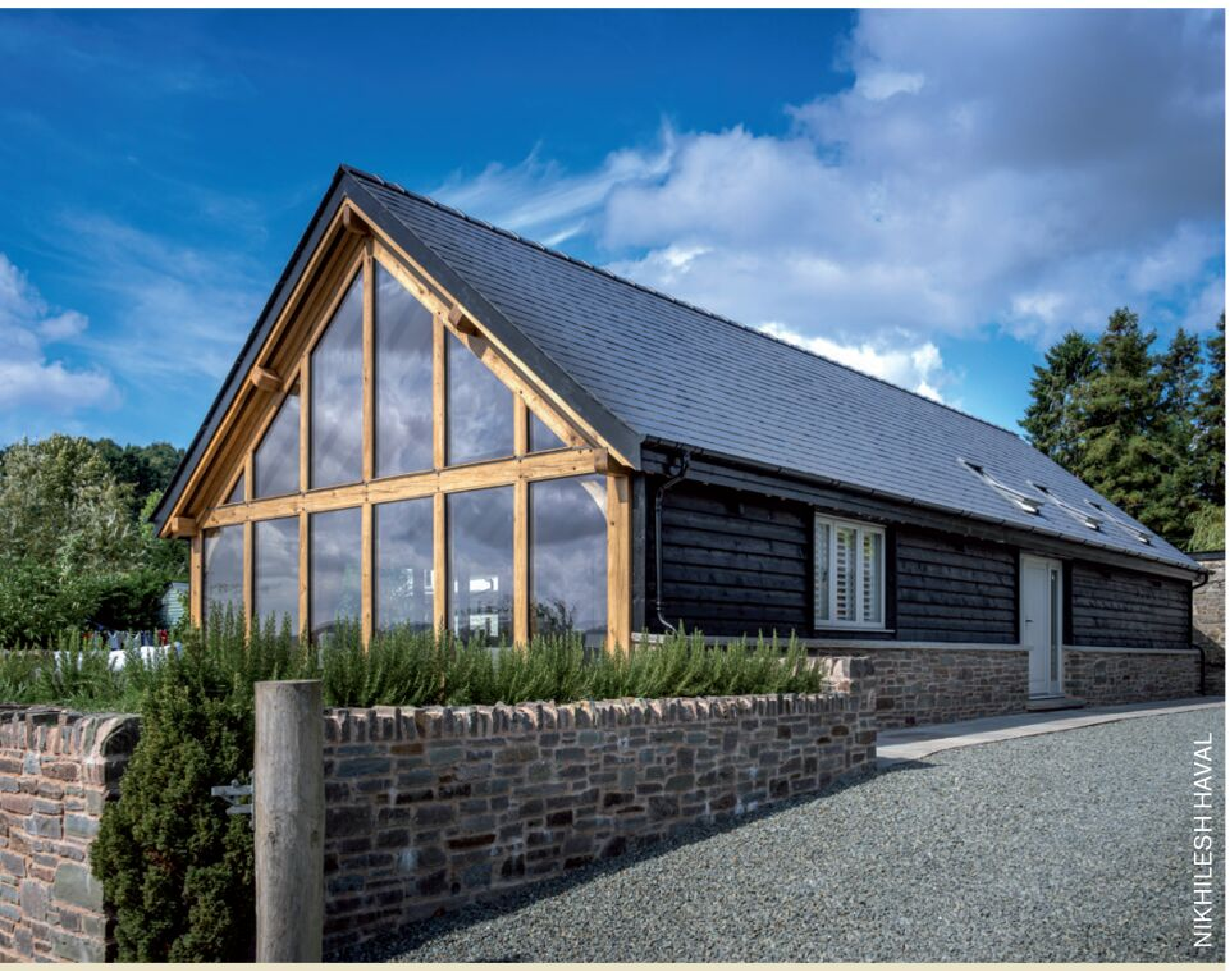
As part of developing his dream house design, self builder Harry Van Gorkum customised a Dan-Wood 150E scheme. The 1.5-storey, 160m^2 three-bedroom home has been finished in a mix of larch cladding and sleek white render. The open-plan kitchen-diner features two sets of large, glazed doors, which open out onto the garden, making for a light-filled, sociable space that's well-suited to family life. Dan-Wood designs include air source heat pumps as standard, so Harry is able to benefit from this source of low-cost warmth throughout the year, alongside underfloor heating (UFH) on the lower storey. The high-spec house cost **£257,907** to build. **(www.dan-wood.co.uk)**



KE-DESIGN

CREAM OF THE CROP

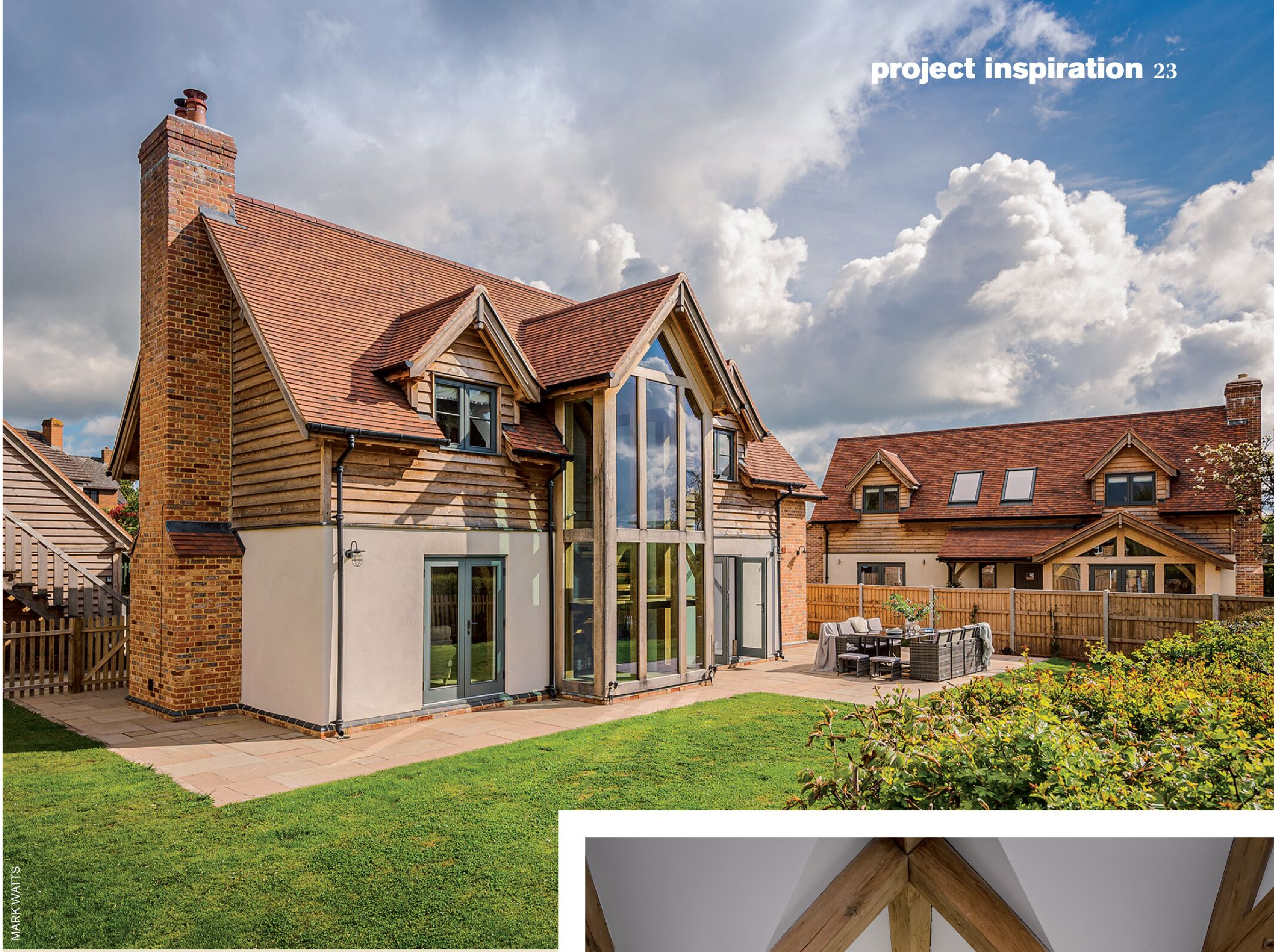
Having lived in the same farmhouse for over 50 years, dairy farmers Roger and Helen Francis were looking to downsize. So, they turned towards a portion of their own land to create a smaller, bespoke dwelling for themselves. The couple enlisted Craig Marston from Ke-Design to design a home to suit the gently sloping site. As the plot is situated within a local needs exception area, the self build had to be smaller than 100m^2 and positioned close by to the other agricultural buildings. Completed for **£205,725**, the brick and block home took under a year to build. It is simple, elegant and traditional, while being perfectly suited to the couple's needs, for both now and later down the line. The exterior is finished with slate roof tiles, handmade heritage bricks, horizontal oak cladding and oak posts that support a veranda area, giving the couple a sheltered space to enjoy all year round. **(www.ke-design.co.uk)**



NIKHILESH HAVAL

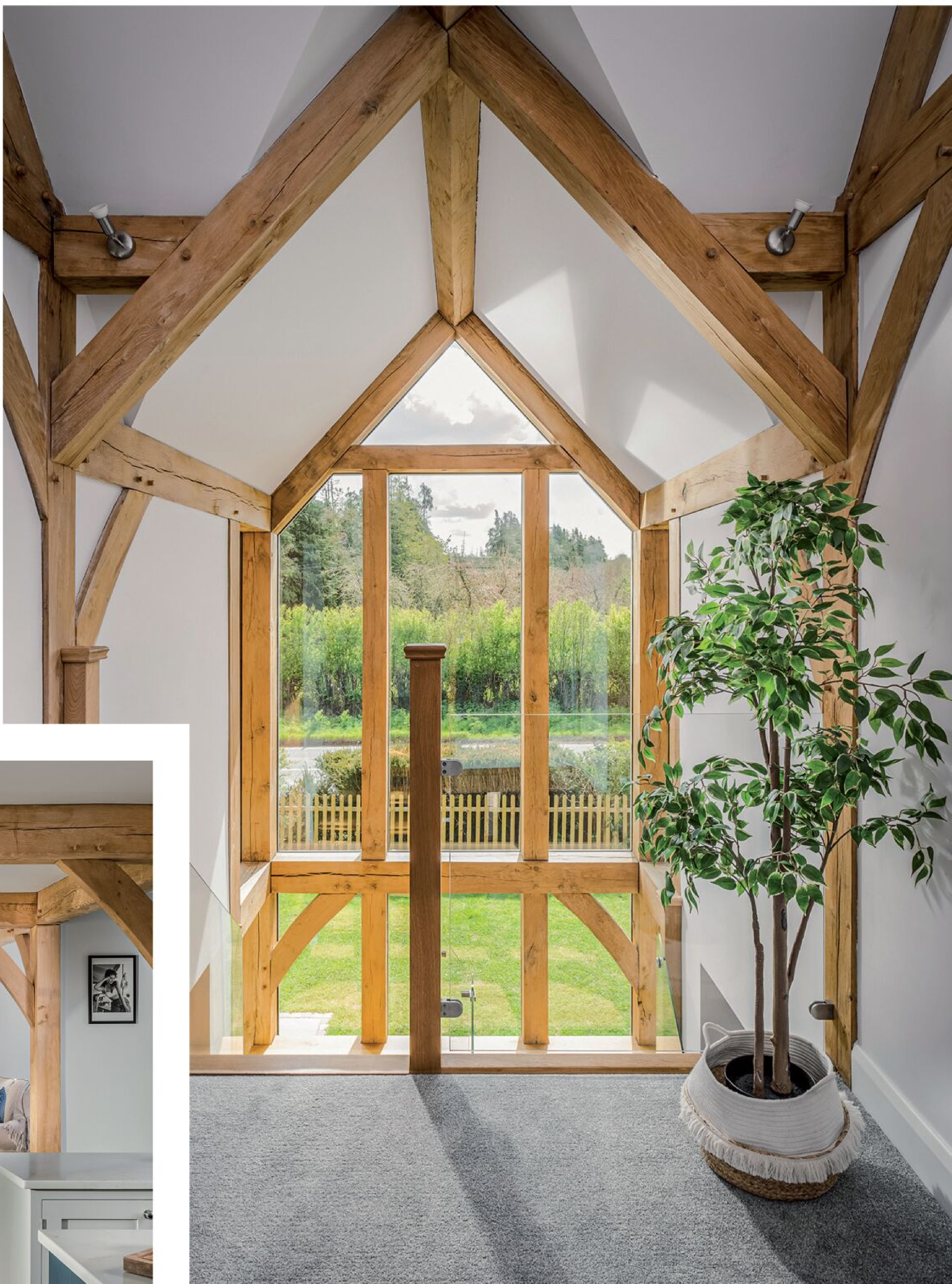
BARN LIFE

After much back-and-forth with local planners, Graham and Diane Roberts built their dream oak frame home on the car park of a former pub in Wales. They also added a separate garage with guest accommodation, all set against glorious mountain views. The couple engaged Welsh Oak Frame to help them create the 120m^2 property. Purchasing the oak frame as a package – which included supply and install – Graham project managed the build alongside his primary contractor, and was on site every day keeping an eye on the build's progress. The barn-style home cost Graham and Diane a total of **£365,000** (£1,217 per m^2), including the main home and garage. The oak frame itself cost £120,000 (£400 per m^2). **(www.welshoakframe.com)**


MARK WATTS

THE RIGHT FIT

After months of searching for their dream property on the market, Charlie and Helen Mills decided to create a new, bespoke home instead. They purchased a custom build plot in Hereford, teaming with oak frame housebuilder Oakwrights to take the project forward. Charlie, managing director at the company, already had an appreciation for oak, and combined with Helen's desire to create a cottage-style home, the design details fell into place. The simple yet elegant self build features an open-plan layout with a central glazed gable, allowing light to reach each corner of the interior. The structure makes use of an aisle frame, which concentrates the oak to the centre of the home. While creating a great aesthetic feature, this also helped to keep the cost of the oak frame to a minimum. The build cost a total of **£220,000**. **(www.oakwrights.co.uk)**



JOHN PAUL

DAVID BARBOUR

BUILDING THE DREAM

When Build It readers Maureen and Johnny Boyle retired, they decided it was the right time to fulfil a lifelong dream – relocating to the Scottish Highlands. They were keen to find a home to suit their needs and were motivated by a desire to downsize. The couple searched high and low, but they couldn't find anything that was quite right, leading them to a self build project. Once they'd found the perfect plot, they engaged Coast 2 Coast Architecture to help turn their ideas for a one-bedroom home into a reality. Finished with silvering larch cladding, the house comprises an open-plan kitchen, dining and living space, complete with vaulted ceilings and spectacular countryside views. The brand new home cost a total of **£214,145** to build. **(www.coast2coastarchitects.co.uk)**

EXPERT VIEW VALUE ENGINEERING A HOUSE DESIGN

LUI ROCCA, architectural designer at Welsh Oak Frame, explores how you can make cost-effective decisions when designing your dream home

Q How will the shape of my self build home impact costs?

Complicated designs can add to the budget; opting for a more standard, simple architectural solution could help you save on construction costs. Dormer windows, lots of corners and a large amount of junctions in the plan will drive up the project's overall price, as these features are more complex to manufacture and erect.

Q Which structural methods can give you the best value for money?

Wood-based structural systems, such as timber frame, oak frame or SIPs, can offer great value for money and will ensure an energy-efficient structural envelope. They all have their pros and cons, though, and some will work better in certain scenarios. Oak can be paired with different build systems and offers guaranteed character.

If you're considering oak for your home project, adopting a hybrid approach and reserving oak for those high-impact areas, with a hidden softwood frame in the less important rooms, is a great, cost-effective way to add character. The beauty of an oak frame is that, by nature of the product, you're ensured a charming, individual house, even if you're building something fairly basic.

Q Which design features are likely to push a budget over the edge?

In general, the main structural elements are not the part that causes a client to overspend. It tends to be the interior specifications, such as flooring, staircases and kitchens – many self builders don't realise how much these elements can cost when embarking on their project. Curved structural features tend to cost more money, too, as they are not designed with standard building materials and would likely be provided by bespoke manufacturers.

Q How can I be smart with spending & reduce costs when self building?

One of the best ways to save money is to get involved with the build in as many ways as possible. The more work you can do yourself the lower your construction costs will be.

It's important to focus your budget on the essential aspects, such as a suitable build system and quality superstructure, efficient glazing and high-performance insulation – often referred to as a fabric-first approach. Work with experienced professionals to get these features right first time round, as changing the various integral elements further down the line will cost more.

You should look to save on features that you won't see – such as kitchen carcasses. Limit use of bespoke features like tiles, too, only placing them where you really need to – sometimes less can be more! Think about the different interior aspects that can be upgraded later on when you have access to additional funds.

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28 **ALL IN THE DETAIL**

Taking inspiration from local agricultural buildings, Jonathan Boyne and Karen Anders created a modern self build home that complements the rural surroundings

38 **MOVING FORWARD**

Katy and Alan Pateman called on their local MP to help them gain planning permission. The result is an oak frame country cottage, that suits them to a tee

47 **BOLD & BEAUTIFUL**

Blu and Corey gave their Victorian flat in London a contemporary update with a bold, colourful renovation and light-filled brick extension

MORE ONLINE »

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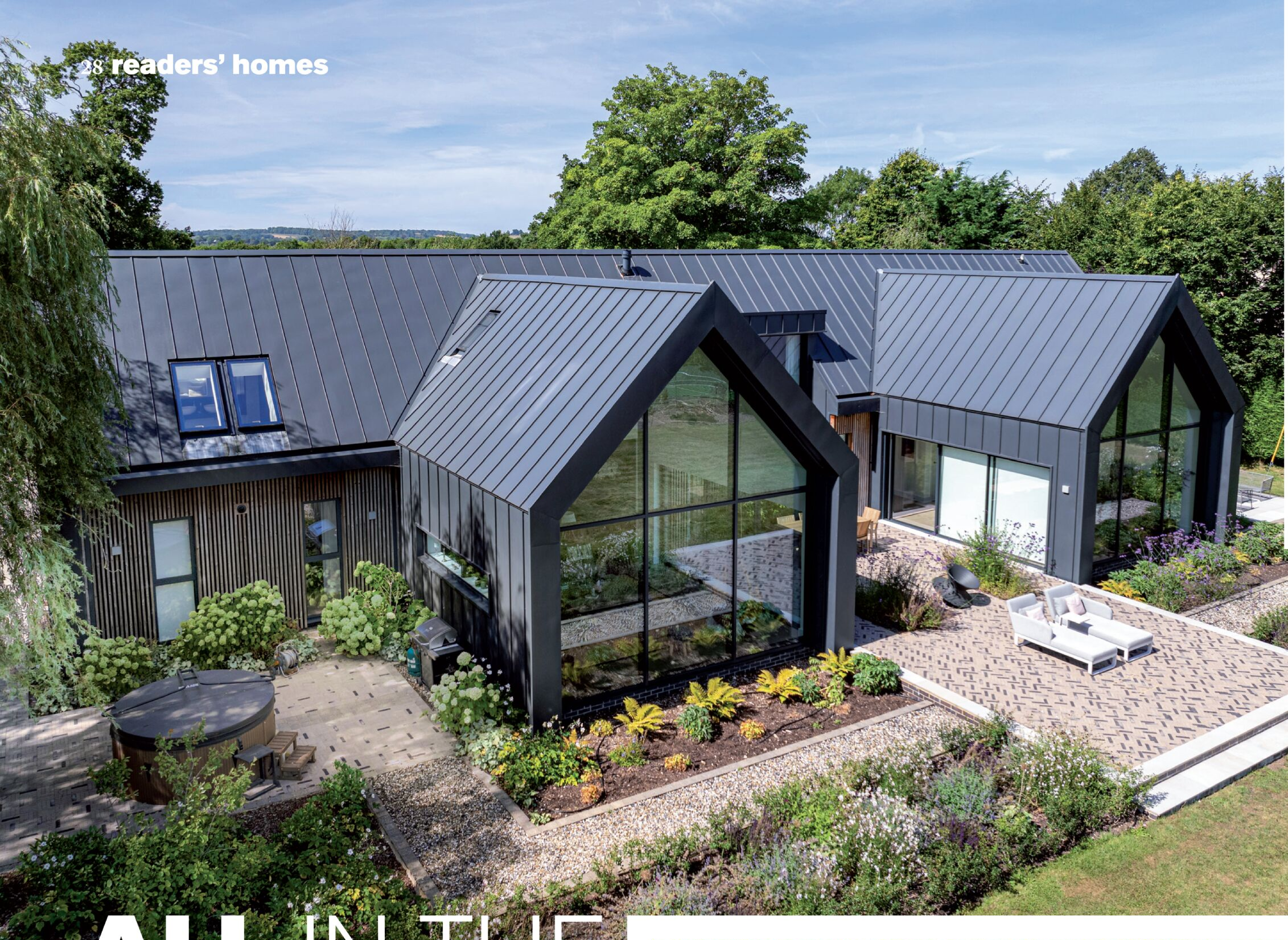


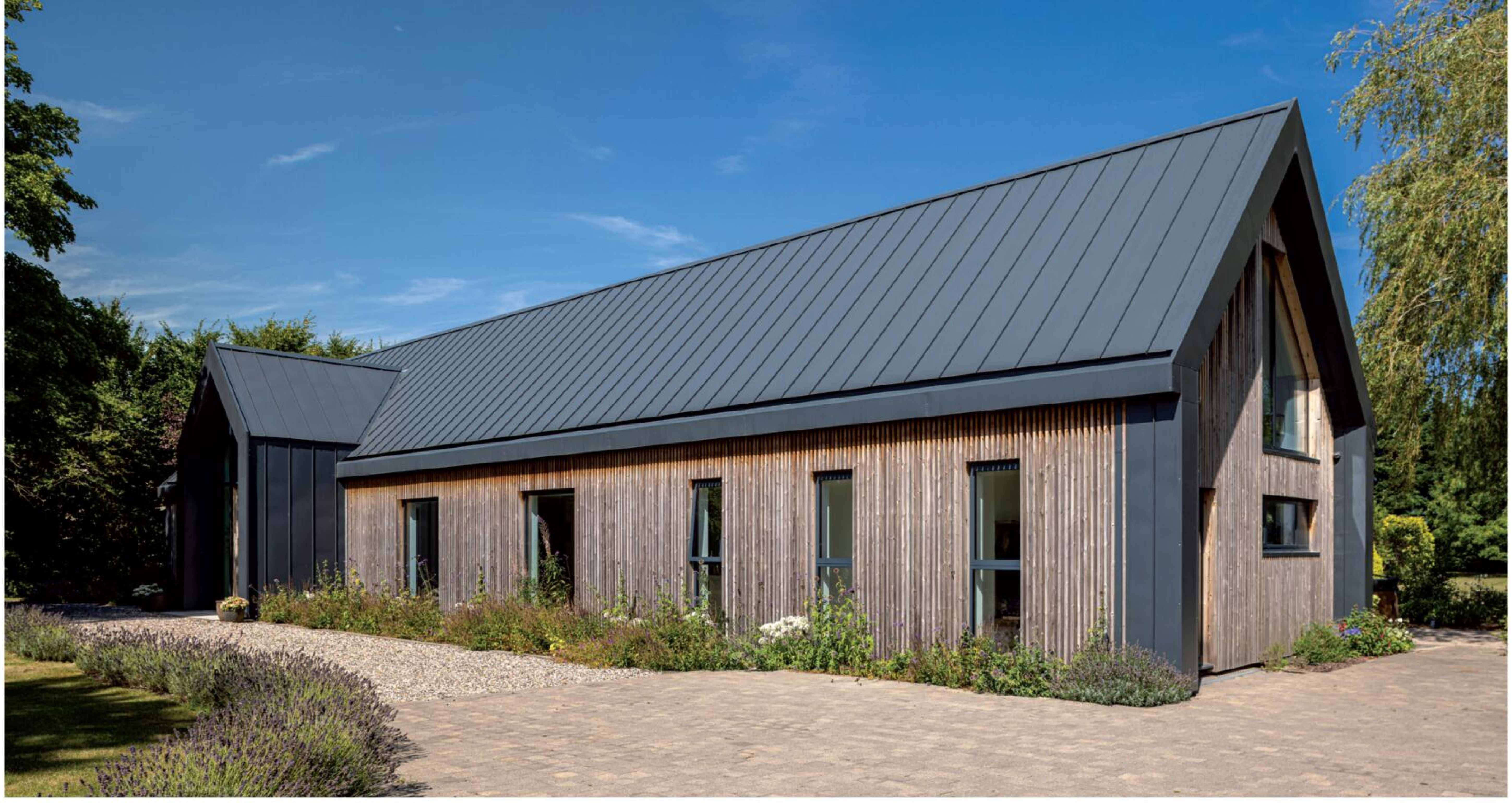
ALL IN THE DETAIL

Jonathan Boyne and **Karen Anders'** contemporary take on a barn was an absolute dream to build, thanks to a top team and plenty of planning

WORDS **EMILY BROOKS** PHOTOS **MIKE COUCH & PAUL CRAIG**

Like many self builders, Jonathan Boyne and his partner Karen Anders weren't initially expecting to go all-in on creating a new home from scratch. "We were searching for a really long time," says Jonathan about the two-year hunt for their ideal contemporary abode. Loving the Oxfordshire town they already lived in, they didn't want to stray too far from it. Yet the large, modern style of house they wanted just didn't exist among the quaint cottages and new build estates.

When the couple finally did buy a local property they thought had potential – a 1940s chalet bungalow on a good plot of land – the plan



Left: On approach, the house is a modest single storey. The barn-like appearance is enhanced by the cedar cladding and sleek metal roof

Below: The gabled entrance area hints to the contemporary style of the house within. The timber pivoting door is oversized, so it looks in proportion with the expansive glazing that surrounds it

was to extend and renovate. "But then one day, when working with our architect, we looked at our plans and realised there were more red lines than black lines," says Jonathan. In other words, more of the old house was going than staying, which triggered a new perspective. "So, why don't we think about knocking it down," he continues. "It immediately freed us of so many constraints."

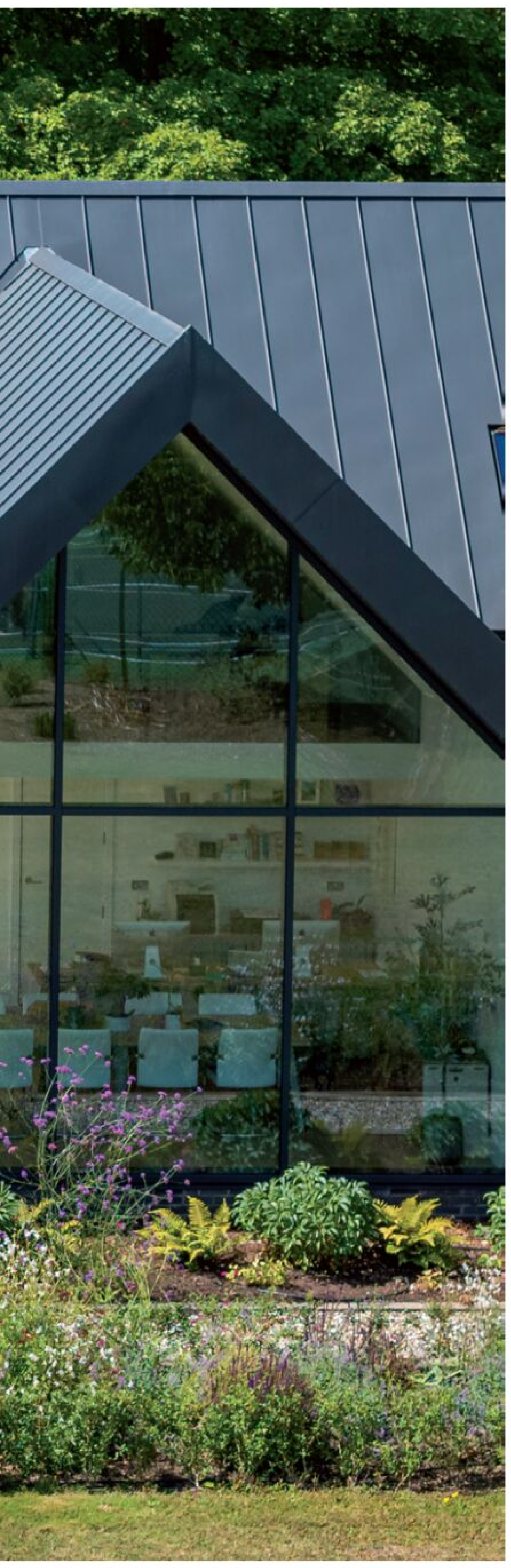
Revisiting the brief

The couple's initial brief to DP Architects was for a contemporary property, which felt at home in its rural surroundings. That goal still held true once the decision was made to knock down and start again. "We've got a lot of farm buildings around us – some wooden, some corrugated steel – so that seemed like a good reference point in terms of materials. We also wanted a lot of glass," says Jonathan. "Those three things ended up dictating what the outside of the house would look like."

Plans were drawn up for a two-storey, four-bedroom house. It would be long and low to mimic a barn, but with a pair of gabled, two-storey volumes projecting into the garden, plus a smaller gable at the front of the house where the entrance would be. Anthracite-coloured steel would wrap the roof and much of the walls, with fully-glazed gable ends to capture the stunning views.

With the concept in hand, they sounded out South Oxfordshire District Council about creating a contemporary new build. "We found them really encouraging – they loved it," says Jonathan. It helped that the footprint was broadly similar to the existing house; although a garage that was part of the bungalow was co-opted into the calculations for the new property to maximise living space. "It passed planning with some small recommendations, for things like frosting a certain window," says Jonathan.

The couple found their architect via recommendation from Karen's brother. "He's in the building trade and was always really impressed with them," says Jonathan. The other important appointment at this stage was their interior designer, Pippa Paton. "Having her involved from day one had a big influence on the architecture," he



Left: Steel cladding and roofing from Catnic defines the architecture at the back of the house, completely wrapping the striking glazed gables. The couple used a landscape designer to create a masterplan for the garden, including brick herringbone paving to echo some of the finishes used internally

Below left: The space between the gabled sections creates a sheltered area for outdoor dining and relaxing, accessible via glazed sliding doors

FACT FILE

NAMES Jonathan Boyne & Karen Anders

OCCUPATIONS Communication director & client services director

LOCATION Oxfordshire

TYPE OF PROJECT Self build

STYLE Contemporary

CONSTRUCTION METHOD Brick & block

PROJECT ROUTE Architect & main contractor

PLOT SIZE 1.8 acres

PLOT COST £860,000

BOUGHT 2016

HOUSE SIZE 520m²

PROJECT COST £1,200,000

PROJECT COST PER M² £2,308

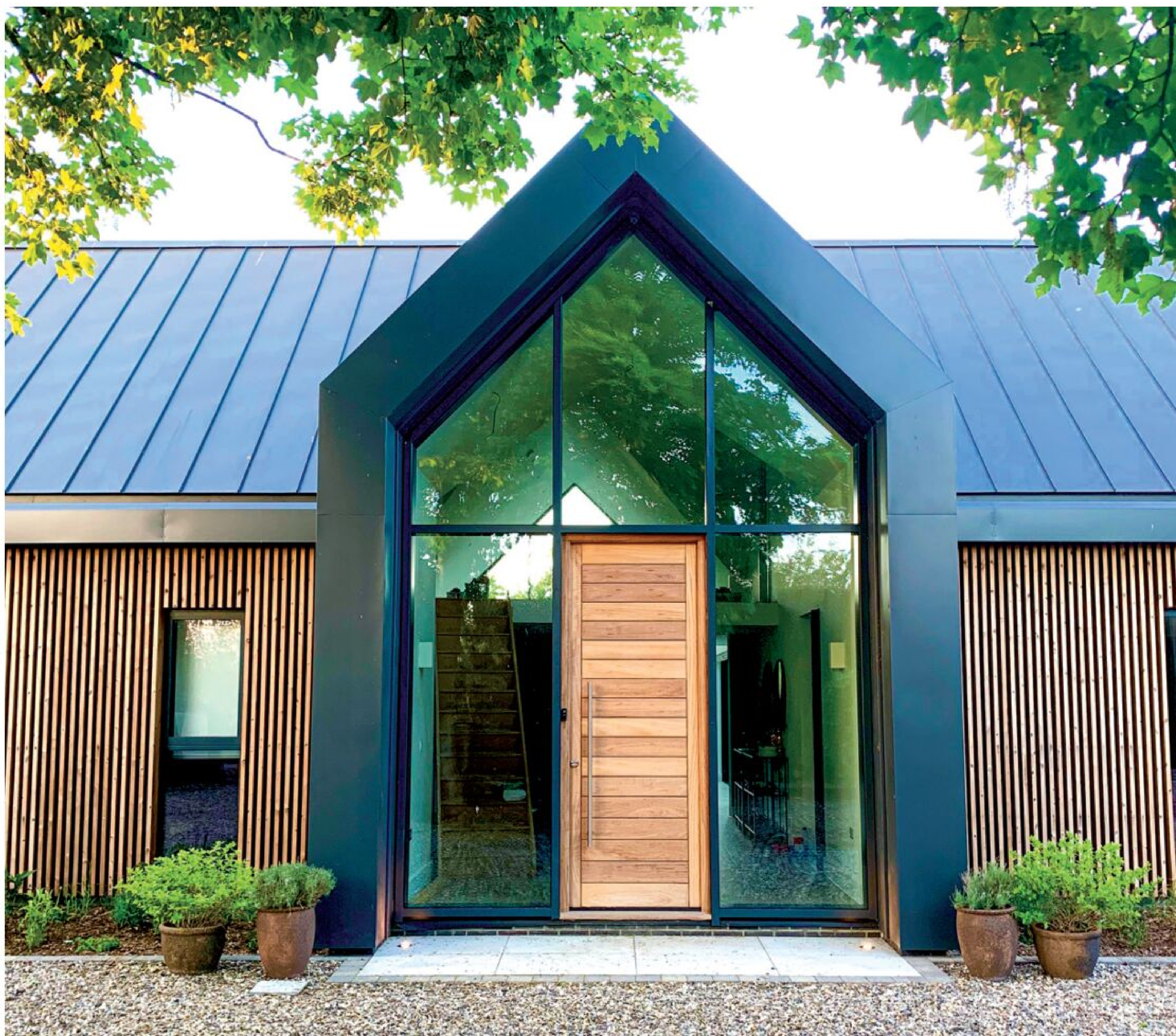
VAT RECLAIM £90,000

TOTAL COST £2,060,000

BUILDING WORK COMMENCED January 2017

BUILDING WORK TOOK 10 months

CURRENT VALUE £3,000,000



WE LEARNED...

HAVING AN INTERIOR DESIGNER involved from day one, working alongside our architect, meant everybody was on the same page from the outset. We could refine, tweak and change things until we achieved something we were happy with.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE how much time it can take to finalise the design. It took us a year, but it was extremely worthwhile knowing that every decision had been made prior to going on site.

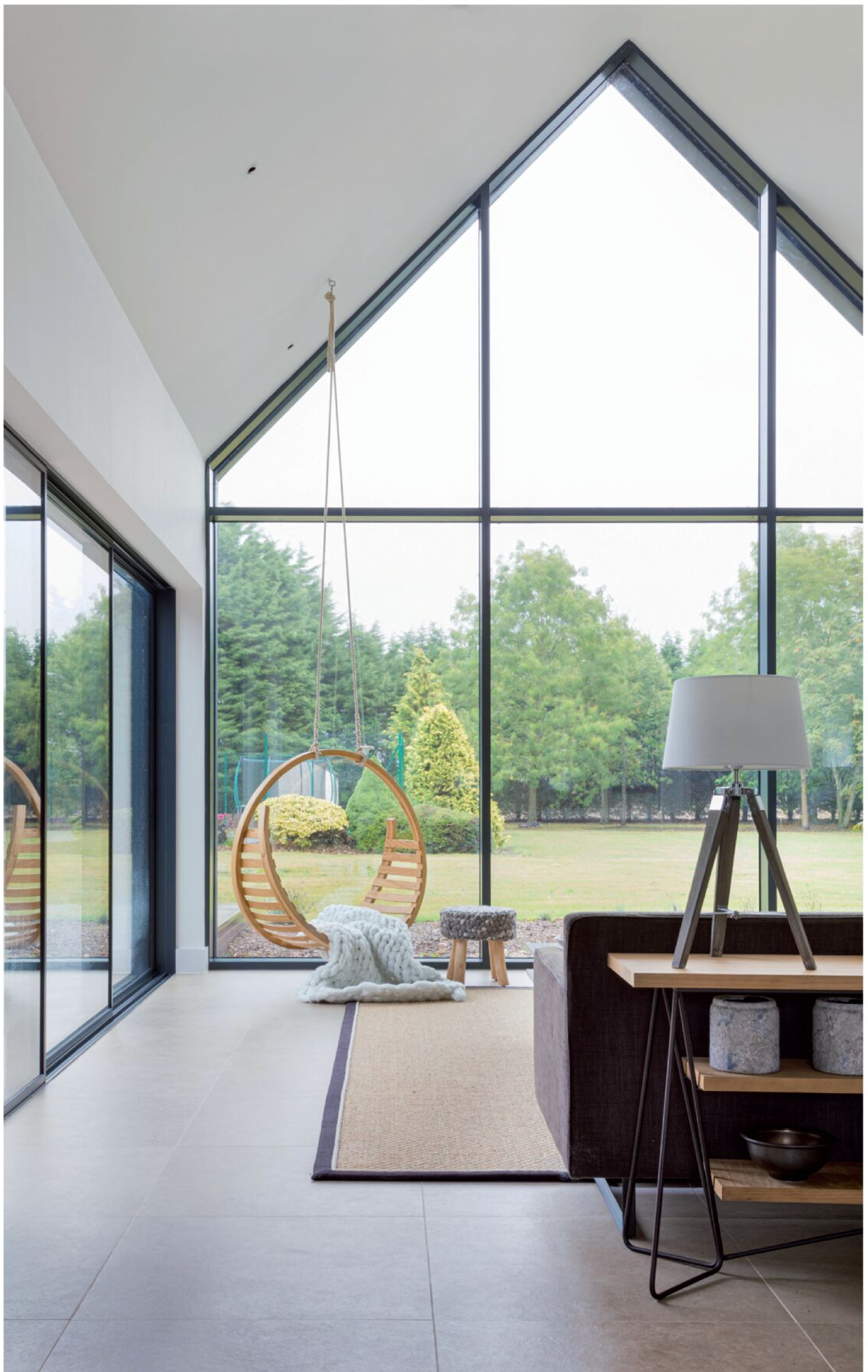
GO AND SEE A FINISHED PROJECT by your proposed main contractor so you can get a sense of the standard they are working to.

BE SURE TO FACTOR IN how much the landscaping will cost. We had to sacrifice our plans for a separate garage for several years in order to prioritise paying for the landscaping.

WE WISH WE'D USED FEWER SPOTLIGHTS in the ceilings. The lower-level lighting is so good that we hardly ever use them, so they feel like a waste.

Above: Jonathan's hobby is restoring classic cars, and this 75m^2 separate garage is the perfect place to do it. The Catnic steel roofing and cladding matches the house, ensuring a sleek finish

Right: A light-filled seating area, backing on to the kitchen-diner, benefits from views through one of the glazed gables – making a great space for entertaining friends



says. While in this instance they were engaged only for the interior scheme, Pippa's practice also undertakes architecture – and it was helpful to have someone who knew how to talk that same language.

Refining the design took a year, and in that time each and every tiny decision had been made – from the location of sockets and switches to what would go into the kitchen and bathrooms. "Everything was resolved before we got on site," says Jonathan.

Building in quality

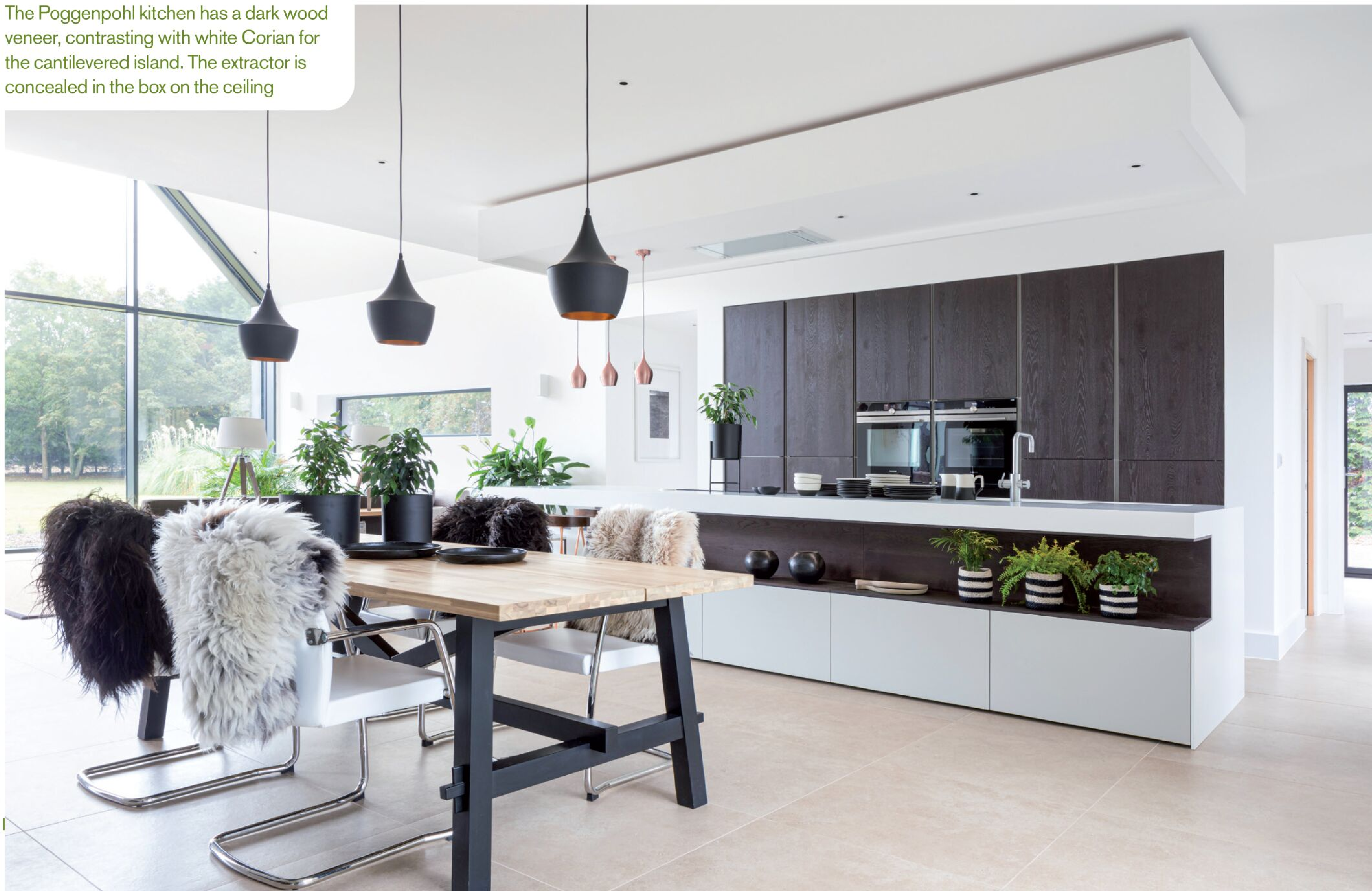
Their main contractor, Simon Harrison (who has since left the construction industry) was recommended by the architects. The

couple were not only happy with the workmanship they'd seen while visiting his previous projects, but also his candidness. "Simon's approach to budgeting was really refreshing," says Jonathan. "He was an open book. He billed per day for his time and charged a mark-up on elements he was procuring, which seemed fair to us. Everything was receipted, right down to the smallest things. He was so fastidious."

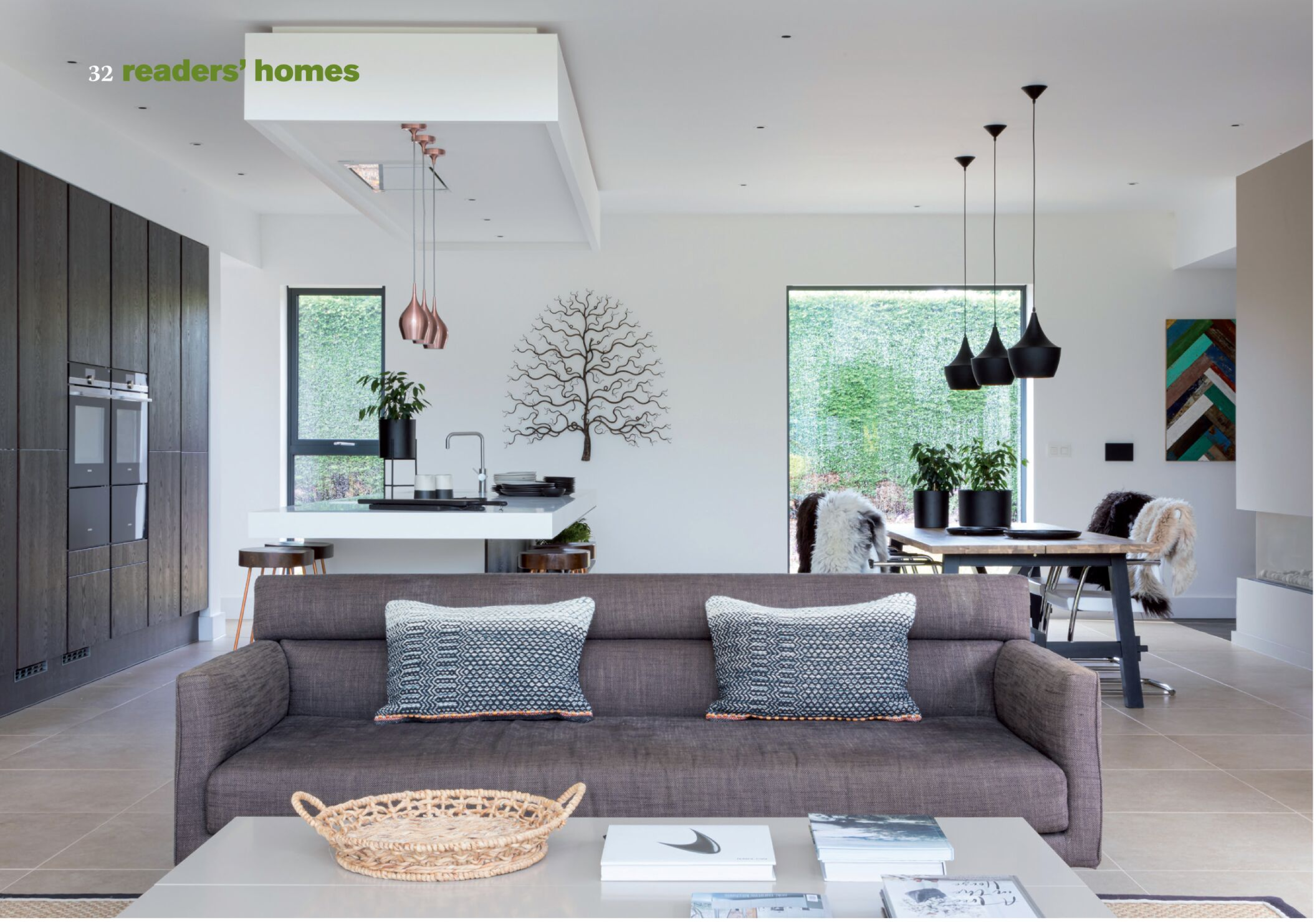
At 520m^2, this is a big house, and the crisply-wrapped building is a world away from a rudimentary agricultural shed. So, it was important to work with a build system and materials that could maximise the budget. The underlying structure is blockwork, topped with attic trusses. The powder-coated steel that wraps over the roof and down the walls, from Catnic, was chosen as a more cost-effective alternative to zinc. This aspect is beautifully detailed, with concealed guttering that doesn't spoil the seamless transition from roof to walls, along with low-profile, flush, Neo rooflights.

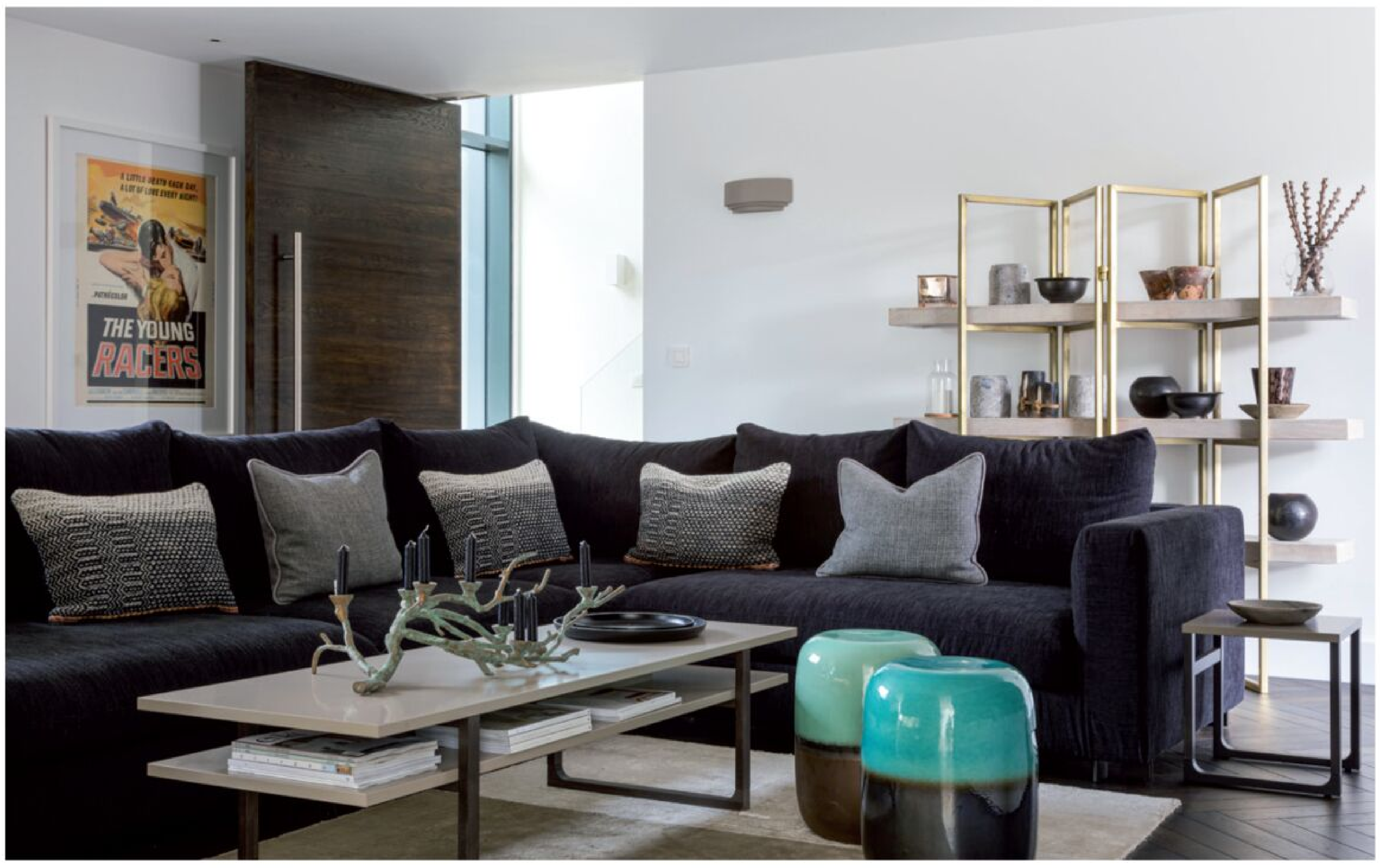
Jonathan and Karen's home is also super-insulated and airtight. A gas boiler powers the heating (underfloor heating downstairs; radiators upstairs) and hot water, while a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery (MVHR) system ensures a pleasant environment.

There were minor issues once the works got underway. Some of these were due to what they'd inherited from the previous house, such as the sewage treatment plant, which was at the wrong ground level and had to be completely redone. Others were to do with the new works, including a window opening that was incorrectly measured. On the whole, though, thanks to a great build team and



The Poggenpohl kitchen has a dark wood veneer, contrasting with white Corian for the cantilevered island. The extractor is concealed in the box on the ceiling

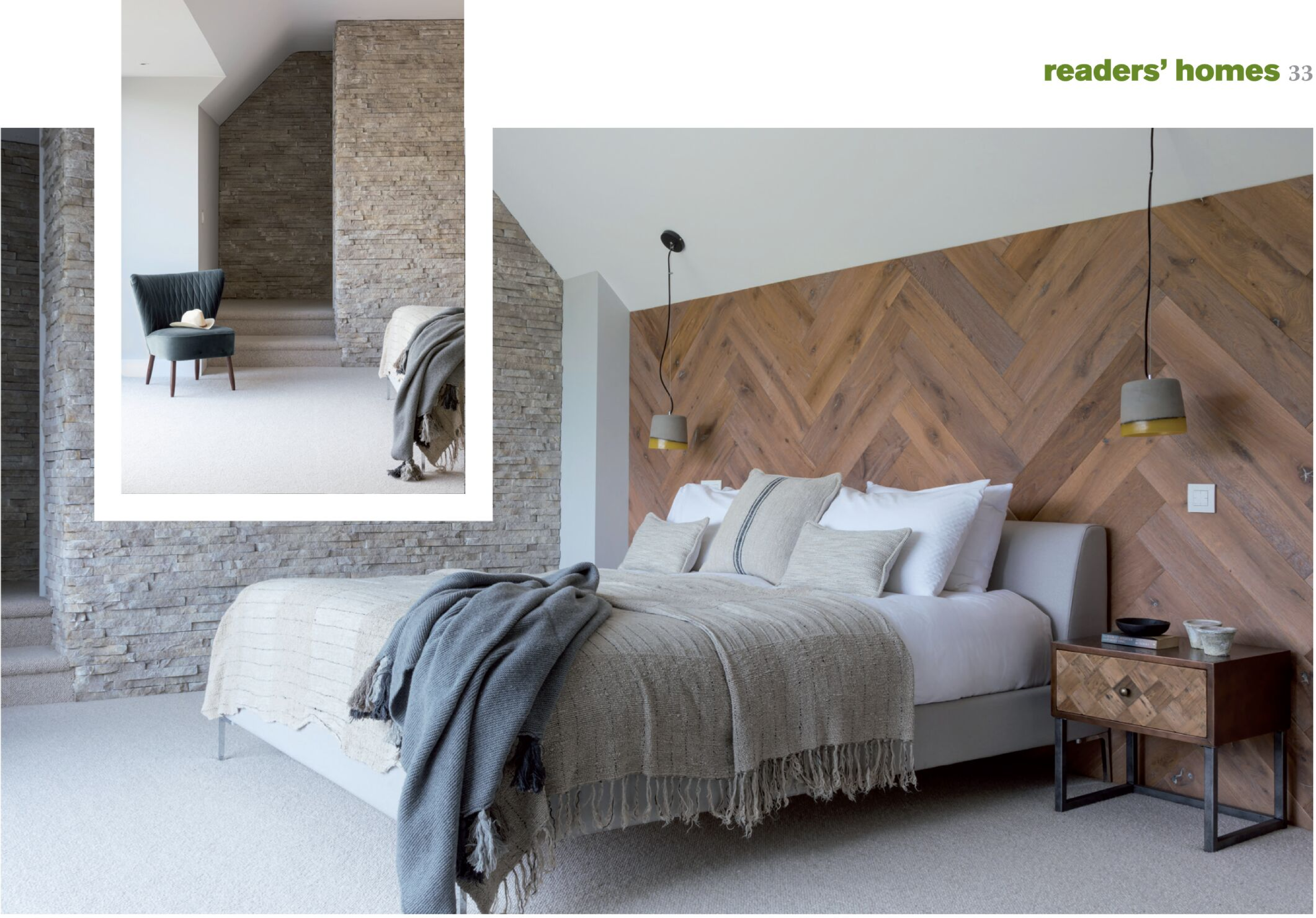




Above & right: There are two main living spaces on the ground floor, one of which has a snug-like feel, with a cosy couch and dark herringbone flooring, which continues up the wall. This room leads onto the kitchen-diner via a broken-plan layout, with dual access to a double-sided fireplace

the minute planning that had gone into every detail, the project was smooth sailing.

The couple rented a property nearby and visited every few days to check on progress. There were lots of memorable milestones. "When the foundations first went down, we were just looking at the block and beam floor and thinking, 'this thing is massive.' Conversely, when the blockwork went up and the rooms were created, it was the exact opposite," says Jonathan. "With no furniture to put it into context, we started to worry that the house felt too small." Each stage bought a new perspective. "I remember when we put in the attic trusses and had the full run of the upper storey for the first time," he says. "We realised we had the most amazing view across the valley that we'd never seen before."



Above: The bedroom steps up into the dressing room and, beyond that, down again into the bathroom. This change in level was designed to create more ceiling height in the kitchen below

Left: The spacious bathroom at the end of the house has views of a willow tree outside. A freestanding bath sits on a section of pebble-like tiles, making it a standout feature

Living the dream

The couple did not need to worry about the size and scale of the house at all. It has beautiful proportions and some real wow-factor moments, including the two double-height gabled sections that frame the spectacular views beyond. On the opposite side of the property, the corresponding vaulted hallway features an overside timber pivot door, set into a wall of glazing; a truly stunning aspect.

Interior designer Pippa Paton worked on the space planning and came up with ideas, such as a generous pantry that runs behind the kitchen, so it can be messy without spoiling the overall impression of neatness in the kitchen-dining-living area. A room-divider wall with an integrated double-sided gas fireplace breaks up the large open-plan ground floor space, so it doesn't feel too vast.

The original budget Jonathan and Karen had set aside for the renovation was blown out of the water by the cost of their high-spec new build. Thankfully, they were able to finance the development through a mix of having recently sold their business, as well as the proceeds from the sale of their previous home.

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HUBL-CC-CS-SBZ-009-0425

Right & below: One of the two guest bedrooms on the ground floor includes a freestanding bath within the room, finished in a pearl mosaic that glimmers against the dark grey walls, and a chrome finish inside

Above: Jonathan's daughter's room is the perfect teenager's den, with a four-poster bed strung with fairy lights

Right: A cylindrical basin in the cloakroom, backed by a grey stone wall, makes a strong design statement

The foundations ended up being more expensive than originally envisaged, and the couple found the recommendations for drainage were fairly onerous, with huge quantities of earth having to be excavated and taken away to create soakaways. These unforeseen difficulties did have a knock-on effect, as their plans for a separate garage/workshop for Jonathan's collection of classic cars had to be shelved in favour of concentrating the remaining funds on the landscaping. "It was either the garage or being surrounded by a moat of mud," says Jonathan. He realised his goal a few years later, though, and the garage – a mini-me version of the house, wrapped in the same steel cladding – was eventually completed in 2022.

"I think all the planning that went into the design is partly why we're so happy with the end result," says Jonathan, who says he loved the process of self building, in part thanks to his main contractor/project manager Simon giving him nothing to worry about. "He ran that site like a military operation. Plus, he loved the challenge of it and really took it on." The project demonstrates what a huge difference well-thought-through design and a great finish can make. It was a collaborative effort that required patience, attention to detail and having a lot of trust in the team. The result speaks for itself. "You could spend £10,000 on materials and implement them badly, or you could spend the same on something with a beautiful design, and the difference would be vast," he says. As for the finished house, the couple couldn't be more delighted. "Every morning, we wake up and feel so grateful for being here. We love the home. It has a positive impact on us every single day," says Jonathan.

closer look

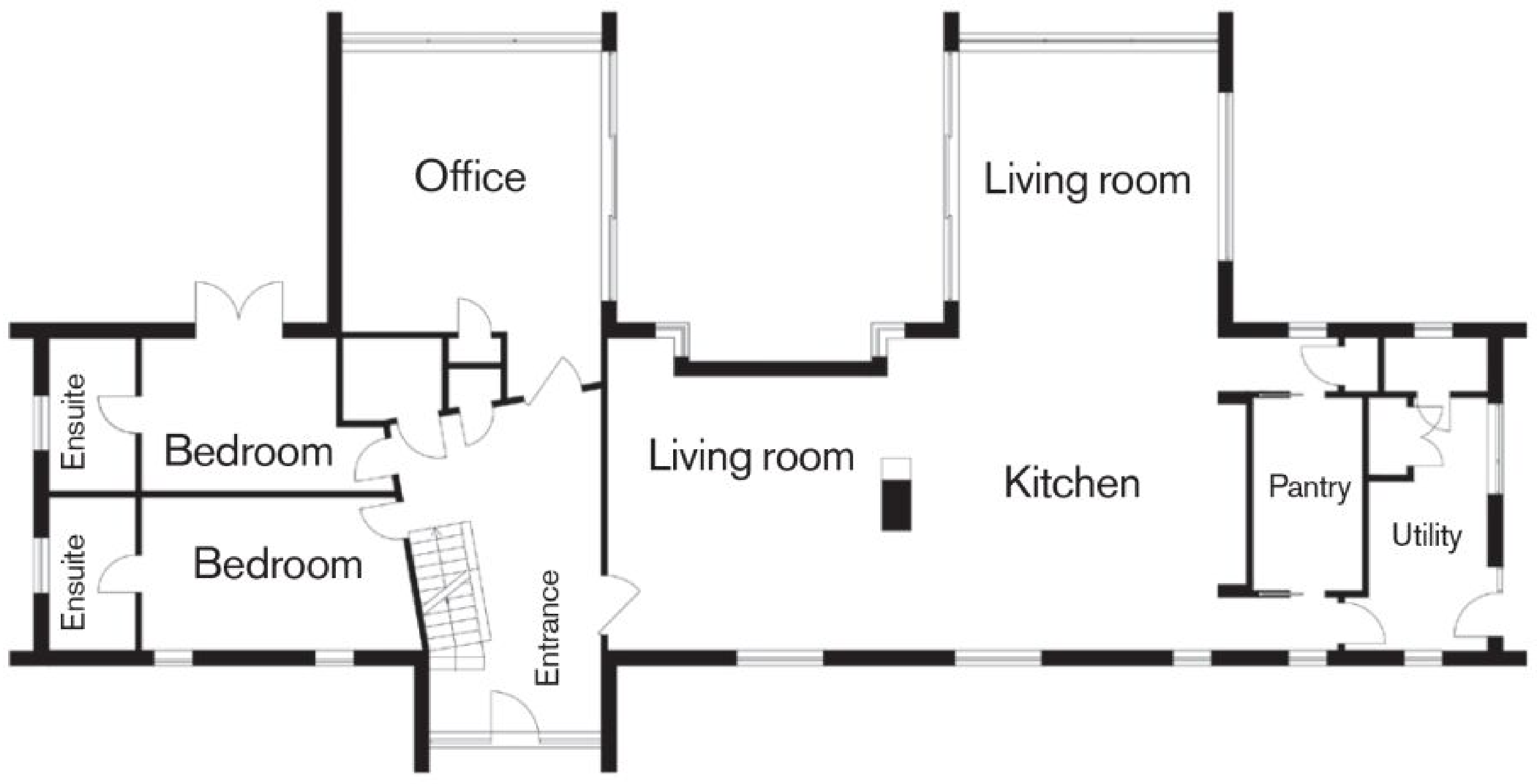
Steel external finish...

Jonathan and Karen specified Urban standing seam powder-coated steel from Catnic for their roof, as well as to partially clad the house's facade, seamlessly wrapping around both. This creates an aesthetic that pays homage to a more agricultural style of building, in a contemporary way. The couple felt it was a more cost-effective alternative to zinc, with the anthracite colourway matched to the aluminium windows and doors. Ease of design and installation was also a big plus, both for the design team and the fitters (Steel Roof Installers) "From a detailing perspective, it's so straightforward: it's a kit of parts," says James Kestell-Cornish of DP Architects. "The Catnic Urban system allowed us to specify a comprehensive detailing and drawing pack for the contractor. It involved multiple intricate junctions and interface detailing, yet nothing was bespoke – it's purely standard details."

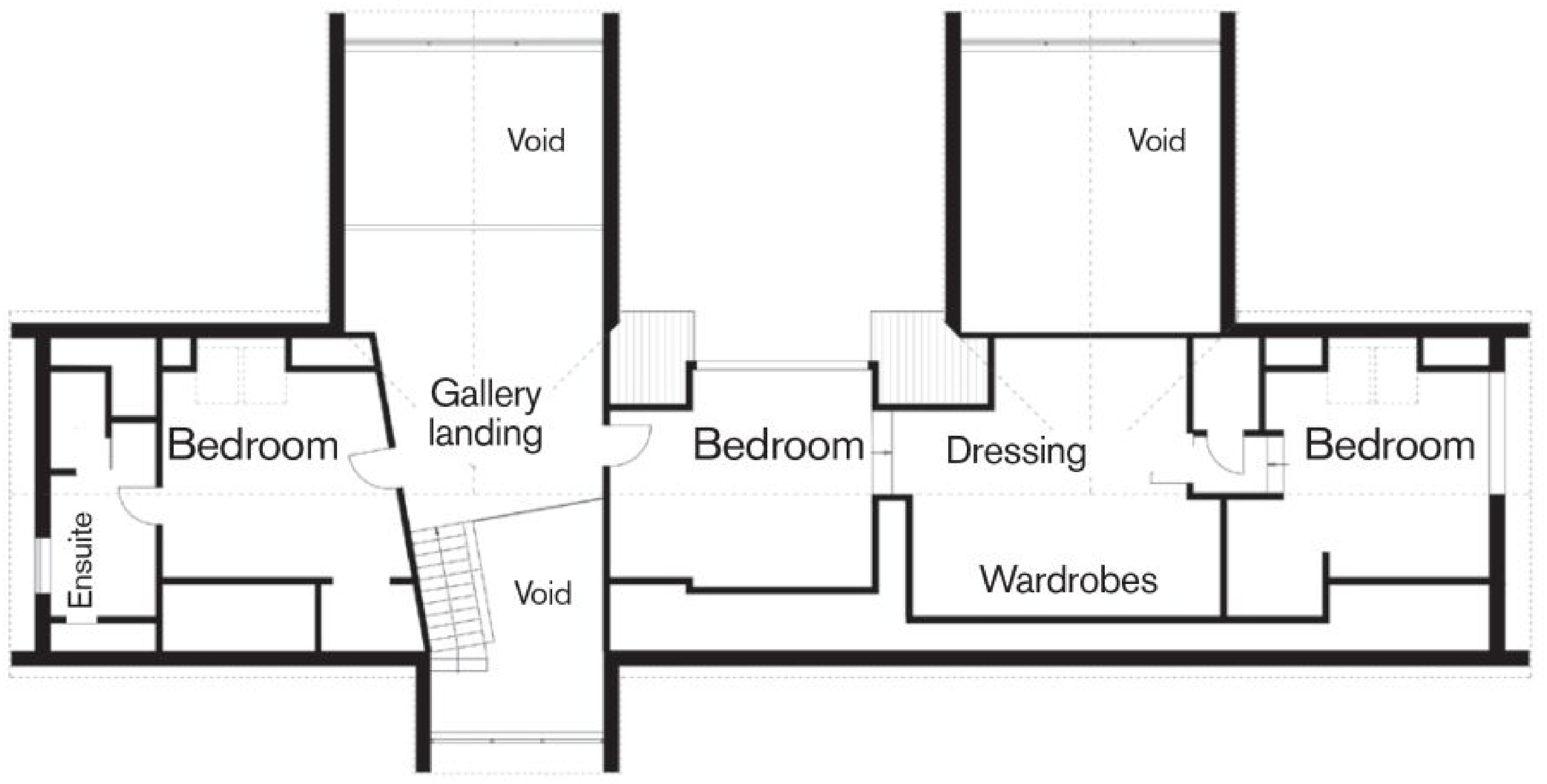
Catnic Urban standing seam cladding

Floor plans

Ground floor



First floor



TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m²	Cost %	Total cost
Fees	£192	8%	£100,000
Preliminaries	£38	2%	£20,000
Foundations & groundworks	£442	19%	£230,000
External walls & windows	£385	17%	£200,000
Roof structure & covering	£288	13%	£150,000
Floor, wall & ceiling finishes	£192	8%	£100,000
Joinery & fittings	£154	6%	£80,000
Plumbing & heating (incl bathroom & kitchen	£288	13%	£150,000
Electrics	£86	4%	£45,000
Decorating	£48	2%	£25,000
External works	£192	8%	£100,000
Grand total			**£1,200,000**

Note: The costs shown here reflect the original prices for materials, labour and services at the time this project was undertaken. As a general guide, inflation in the construction market runs at about 3%-4% per annum.

Useful contacts

ARCHITECTS **DP Architects** 01491 613066 www.dparchitects.co.uk INTERIOR DESIGN **Pippa Paton** 01865 595470 www.pippapatondesign.co.uk GROUNDWORKS **Link** 01869 323140 www.link-ltd.co.uk ROOFING & CLADDING **Catnic** 01244 892449 www.catnic.com ROOFING & CLADDING INSTALLATION **Steel Roof Installers** 07960 994462 www.steelroofinstallersuk.com GLAZING **Express Bi-folding Doors** 0800 121 4809 www.expressbifolds.co.uk ROOFLIGHTS **The Rooflight Company** 01993 833155 www.therooflightco.com STAIRCASE **Riteweld Engineering** 01295 250995 www.riteweldengineering.co.uk ELECTRICS **Stefan Moon** 07729 689309 HEATING, PLUMBING & BATHROOMS **Anders Heating Company** 01844 281900 www.andersheating.co.uk KITCHEN **Goldreif by Poggenpohl** 020 7224 1986 poggenpohl.com LANDSCAPE DESIGN **Rachel Hotston** www.rachelhotston.co.uk LANDSCAPING **Landmark** 07732 329118 www.landmarkgardendesign.com

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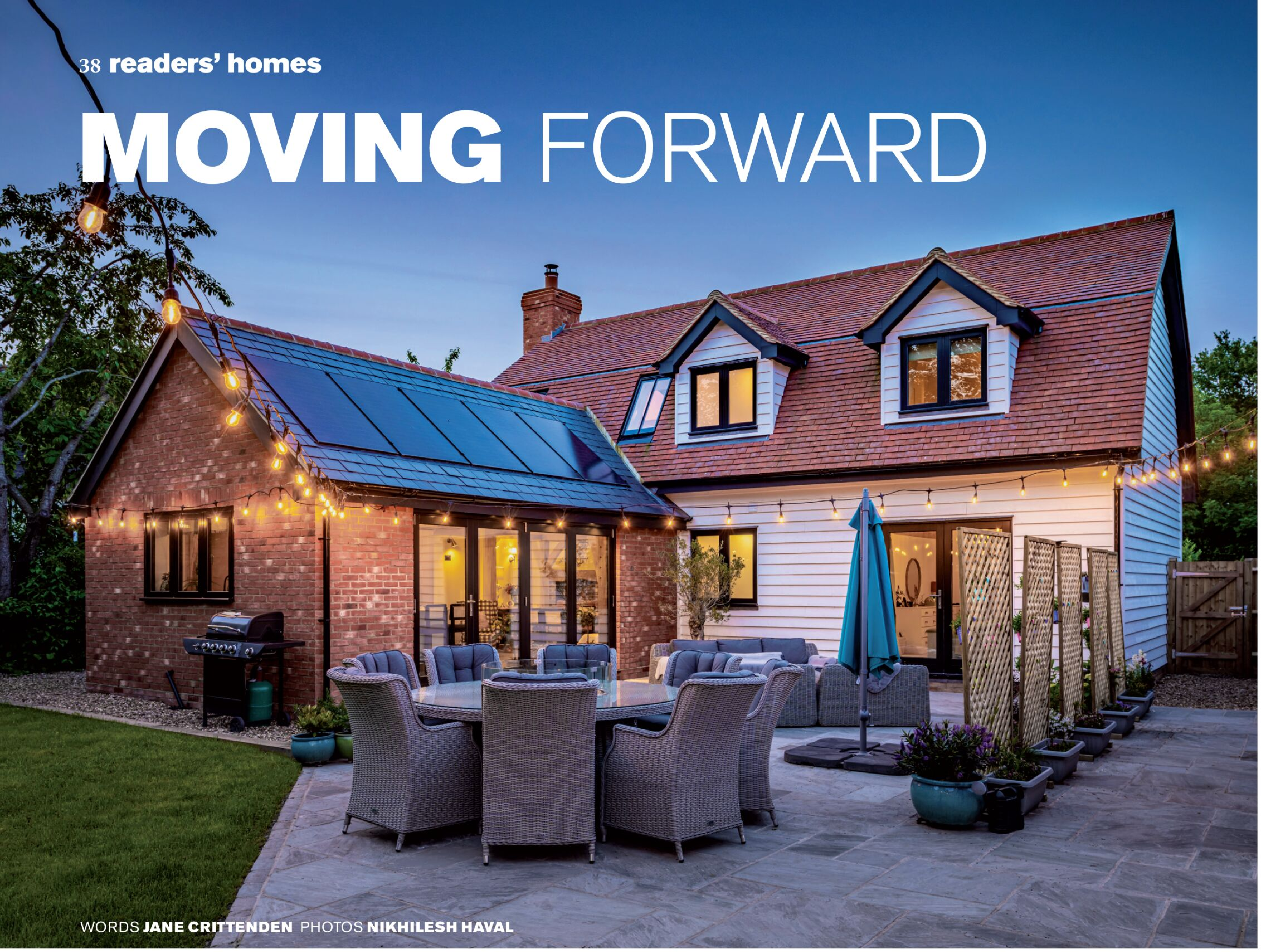


WORDS **JANE CRITTENDEN** PHOTOS **NIKHILESH HAVAL**

Faced with a decision to either renovate an old mill or take on a plot with lapsed planning, **Katy** and **Alan Pateman** crunched the numbers and – with support of a builder friend – embarked on the journey to creating a stylish oak frame cottage

Not long after Katy and Alan Pateman had downsized to a riverside new build townhouse in Essex, where they planned to semi-retire, they had an idea to self build. Problems with the property management committee had started to cast a dark shadow over their lives, and the couple made the brave decision to move out. Leaving their house empty, the couple rented a friend's annexe in a village on the Blackwater estuary, along with their teenage son, Frank. It was here they spotted a plot for sale and began to ponder an alternative route.

"We liked living in the village because it was beautiful and peaceful, with a small school, church and a pub. However, there were not many properties coming on the market," says Katy. "We saw the plot, but the thought of self building was beyond us, we didn't even really do any DIY!" The land had previously been an allotment next to the village hall. It had lapsed outline planning for a two-bedroom, Essex-style cottage and had been on the market for three years. "A friend of a friend owned the land, so we were aware it had a rather tricky planning history. The site also had no access to water, sewage or electricity," says Katy. "Our other option was to renovate an old mill house that was up for sale in the next village."

Self build or renovate?

The couple put their townhouse on the market and took time to review both projects in more detail. Although the plot was inside the defined settlement boundary of the village, it was also within a conservation area – part of the reason the landowners had found it so tough to get planning approval. "We knew we wouldn't be allowed to build just anything on there," says Katy. "We found out that five different designs had already been rejected, with the lapsed scheme – and an updated version – the only one accepted."

The outline design was for a 164m^2, one-and-a-half storey, two-bedroom cottage, featuring traditional external materials, including timber cladding and reclaimed roof tiles. The plan also included solar panels, a car charger and an energy-efficient heating system. Permission had been granted in 2015 and again in 2017, after the landowner applied to increase the ground floor footprint by 31m^2.

Alan, an accountant, had a builder client who was available to take on one of the projects, so there was a lot to consider. "Alan and I debated both options, but we liked the idea of living in a cottage with modern conveniences," says Katy. "I got a quote for a softwood frame, but decided the property would look too boring. I then got

Left: The oak frame went up faster than a traditional brick and block masonry build, so the project could move on to getting watertight more quickly

Left: Solar PV panels from Green Building Renewables, who the couple met at a Build It Live show, were a planning requirement. They meet the family's electricity demand during the summer months

chatting to a friend who lives in a huge oak frame house. She loves this build system and suggested we go down this route, although I expected it would be out of our budget."

Finalising the design

After another friend showed them around his oak frame property, Katy and Alan were persuaded to contact the company that he had worked with on the project: Welsh Oak Frame. "We still hadn't bought the land; we didn't have planning permission; and there was a chance we might still renovate the mill. We really didn't know what we were doing at that point," says Katy. "But we were impressed with Welsh Oak Frame's designer and the quote. It turned out the oak frame was one of the cheaper parts of the build."

Katy and Alan came to an arrangement with the landowners to have first refusal to buy the plot if they got planning permission. Welsh Oak's designer came to site and the couple showed them the

FACT FILE

NAMES Katy & Alan Pateman

OCCUPATIONS Homeowner & accountant

LOCATION Essex

TYPE OF PROJECT Self build

STYLE Contemporary

CONSTRUCTION METHOD Oak frame

PROJECT ROUTE Main contractor

PLOT SIZE 0.27 acres

PLOT COST £225,000

BOUGHT 2022

HOUSE SIZE 168m²

PROJECT COST £460,000

PROJECT COST PER M² £2,738

VAT RECLAIM £23,000

TOTAL COST £685,000

BUILDING WORK COMMENCED November 2022

BUILDING WORK TOOK 12 months

CURRENT VALUE £850,000

The frame is made from oak that's pre-cut in Welsh Oak Frame's workshop and put together with traditional peg and dowel joints. The infill panels are battened and clad in weatherboarding. The roof joists and dormers are built with softwood

> *"We've gone from rock bottom to living the dream, and we absolutely love everything about living here"*

Above: The inglenook fireplace is built with London Weathered Yellow bricks and fitted with a Hergom E30 woodburner from Simply Stoves

Right: A pair of cruck trusses give character to the kitchen, located in the single storey rear part of the cottage. The Shaker cabinetry was made by JN Interiors and is a mix of white and a colour-match to Farrow & Ball's Sulking Room Pink

original design. While going through the process of making changes to the internal layout, Katy applied to tweak the house's street-facing elevation with a double-storey porch, so they could have a study located upstairs – but the local planning authority rigidly refused.

Starting the works

Their final plans were submitted in early 2022, mirroring the approved design, but with an additional 4m^2 of downstairs space. It had been several years since a brand new property was built in the conservation village, and no one in the planning department appeared to want to take responsibility for the decision. "In the end, I got our local MP involved. He was brilliant and helped to get our

Left: Katy wanted exposed beams in the living room, as the small window and low ceiling already had a traditional cottage feel; the oak adds to the cosy vibe

application through in November 2022," says Katy. "This included permission to have a caravan on site for Frank to live in during the project, and to build a one-bedroom cabin for ourselves.

Long-term client and friend, Greg Marston from Marston Contracts, was the couple's first pick for the job. He took on the project with enthusiasm, despite having not built a complete house before. "We mostly do big refurbs and large extensions with block and beam floors, but the bricklayer who works with me had plenty of house building experience," says Greg. "Old houses throw up all sorts of unexpected problems, so starting from scratch was actually the easier option."

The Patemans signed up without securing a fixed price. Alan paid some of the trades direct and when Greg, a multi-skilled builder, wasn't needed, he worked on other jobs, so they weren't paying unnecessary standing costs. "It was a bit risky but, since Alan's been Greg's accountant for 35 years, we knew he wouldn't let us down," says Katy. "We might have found a cheaper builder more locally if we wanted to, but we didn't want the bigger risk of working with someone we didn't know."

Construction work began on site in November 2022, and the build team used a generator until services were finally connected. The water company shut off traffic to lay its pipework, while the distribution network operator ran the electric supply on the same day – both up to the property's border. Greg's experienced team then picked up the feed, taking it to the site of the cottage, where they were already working on the foundations, right alongside the cabin Katy and Alan would live in during the rest of the works.

The couple moved into the cabin in March. Not long afterwards, the oak frame arrived to the site be erected by a team from Wales, organised by Welsh Oak Frame. "They came as a three, from three generations, and worked 12 hours a day even in Biblical rain," says Katy. "The team told me it would take three weeks, but they got everything finished in just two – they were really amazing."

Katy and Alan turned the dining room on the original plans into their ground floor master suite, and enjoy the bungalow-like feel way of living

WE LEARNED…

EVEN IF YOU DON'T really have any DIY or building experience, there is so much you can learn by working with a trusted builder and asking questions along the way. You'll enjoy the achievement.

THERE'S PLENTY TO DO to help on your project without build knowledge or practical skills. I was able to support our builder by ordering and organising deliveries and picking up last minute materials. I also made lots of tea and upcycled or made furniture, taking advantage of the builders' tools while they were on site.

BUILDING A HOUSE to someone else's design was easier in many ways. I didn't need to worry about getting it wrong and lots of decisions were already made for us, and couldn't be changed because of the planning conditions. However, the cottage isn't a compromise because we liked the look from the start.

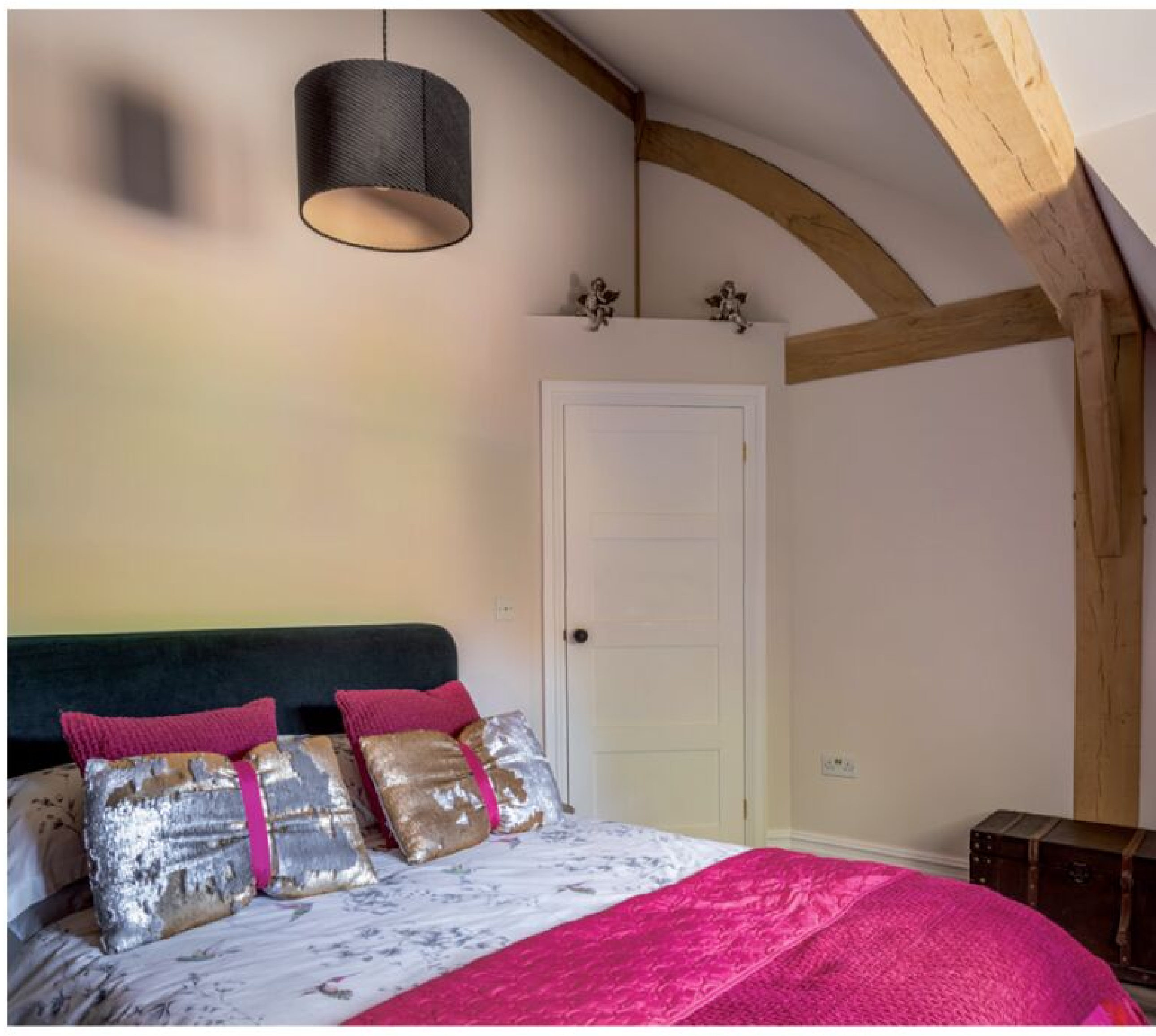
AN OAK FRAME HOUSE build doesn't have to be expensive if you choose a company who's willing to work within your budget

Managing the project

Katy was the main point of contact during the build, and living on site proved handy. "I made lots of tea and did lots of running around," she says. "I got a friends and family discount at Jewson, via a friend whose son works there, sold my sports car and leased an estate so I could drive around and pick up materials. Greg used to write a list of what was needed on a piece of wood or a tile, and at Screwfix they'd greet me by name as I came through the door."

Once the framers were finished, Greg's team battened out the exterior and fitted the weatherboarding. Dropping the cables and pipework from upstairs to the ground floor provided an extra challenge, due to the oak beam running around the ceiling perimeter. "When I had to cut through, it meant drilling into the thick oak frame, which I had not done before," Greg says. "Fixing conventional door liners between two big posts needed a bit of thought, too, as I wanted the finished architrave and beading to look neat and tidy with the oak."

The project moved along smoothly, although hooking into the mains sewer proved difficult. The couple needed permission to use



the village hall connection next door, which also meant going across their car park. Instead, they found installing a septic tank to be an easier and more affordable solution.

Two tall trees in the village hall play area were also problematic, interfering with signal during the build. Katy sought permission to trim them back and, in doing so, discovered the playground fence had been put up in the wrong place and the trees were actually on their property. "We didn't take back all the land as we didn't want to spoil the play area," says Katy. "We moved the fence just enough to put the trees back on our side so we could deal with them."

Above right: With the help of Welsh Oak Frame's design expertise, one of the upstairs bedrooms was split into two, with angled doors to make the layout usable

closer look

Re-shaping the interior...

Adding more bedrooms

Given the complex planning history on the site, Katy and Alan decided to largely maintain the exterior design from the outline approval. "Outside, we had to predominantly use painted white weatherboarding – but I like the look of a chocolate box cottage," says Katy. The interior, however, offered the opportunity to make changes to better suit their tastes and lifestyle. Since there was nothing structural in the original drawings, they had freedom to adjust the layout and refine the use of oak in tandem with Welsh Oak Frame's designer. "I felt that having less oak on display would make our home appear more open," says Katy. "I wanted beams, but didn't want the rooms to be overloaded." As part of the process, the couple managed to turn the two-bedroom cottage into a four-bed – splitting one of the upstairs rooms into two, as well as taking some space from the second bedroom to create an ensuite for Frank. The open landing now hosts an office, while Katy turned the large dining room and cloakroom on the ground floor into the main bedroom suite. "I like that we have our own space but still have enough bedrooms if our older kids decide to move back home," she says. "Perhaps the only thing I would do differently is have a vaulted entrance hall, as the office upstairs doesn't really get used."

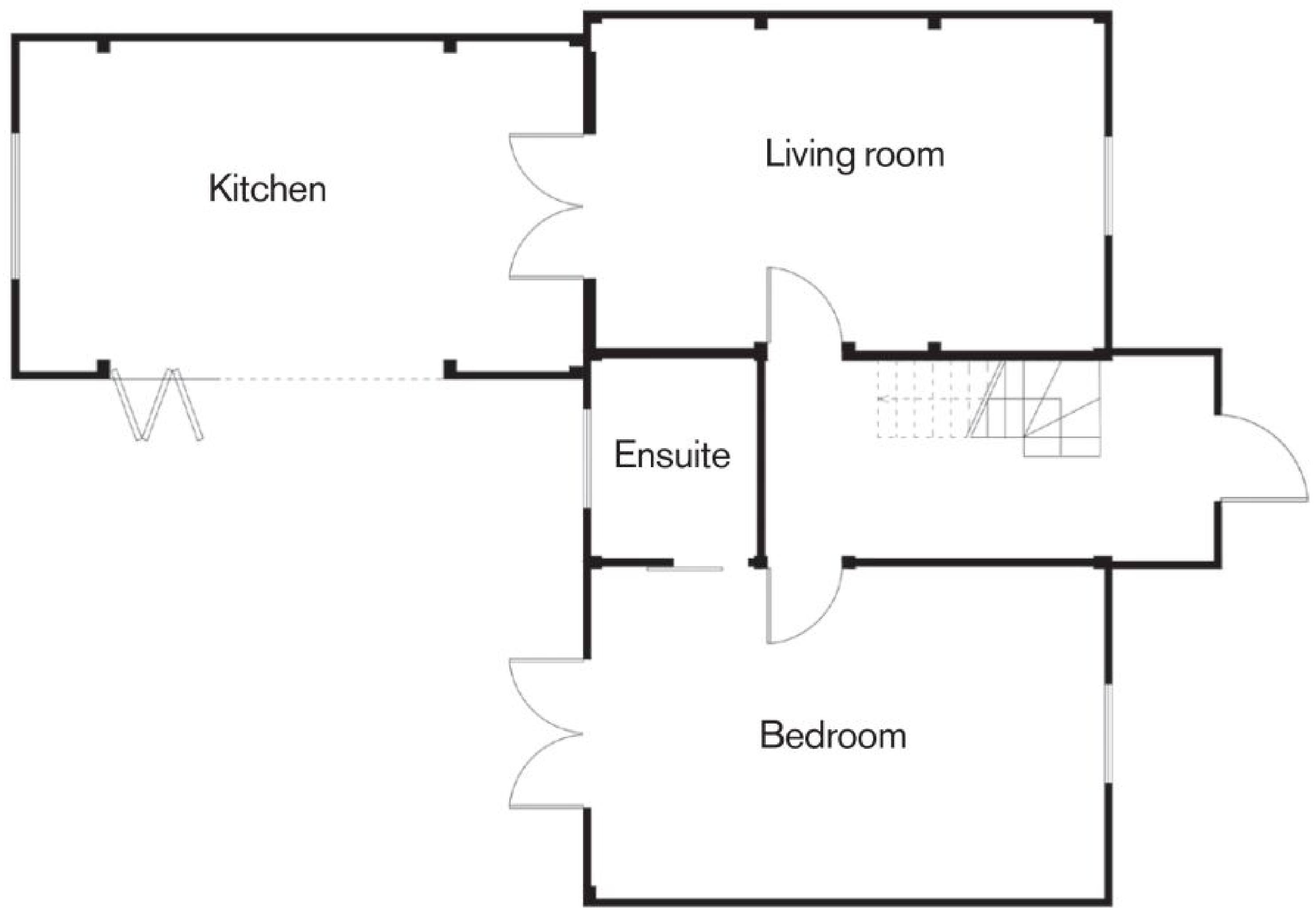
The build team worked quickly, which the couple were grateful for, as they'd taken a high interest mortgage – similar to a bridging loan – that had to be paid back within a year. They managed to hold out on taking the loan until March 2023, but the clock was ticking.

Katy and Alan thought they'd reached the finishing line when they moved into the cottage a year after works commenced, in December 2023, and building control arrived to sign it off – but came up against a delay. "They refused because we hadn't built the accessibility ramp out front," says Katy. "It was very stressful because we couldn't settle the loan and move to a standard mortgage, with a lower interest rate, until we had approval. We managed to do it the following month, two months before the deadline, although the interest was still astronomical and cost us £50,000."

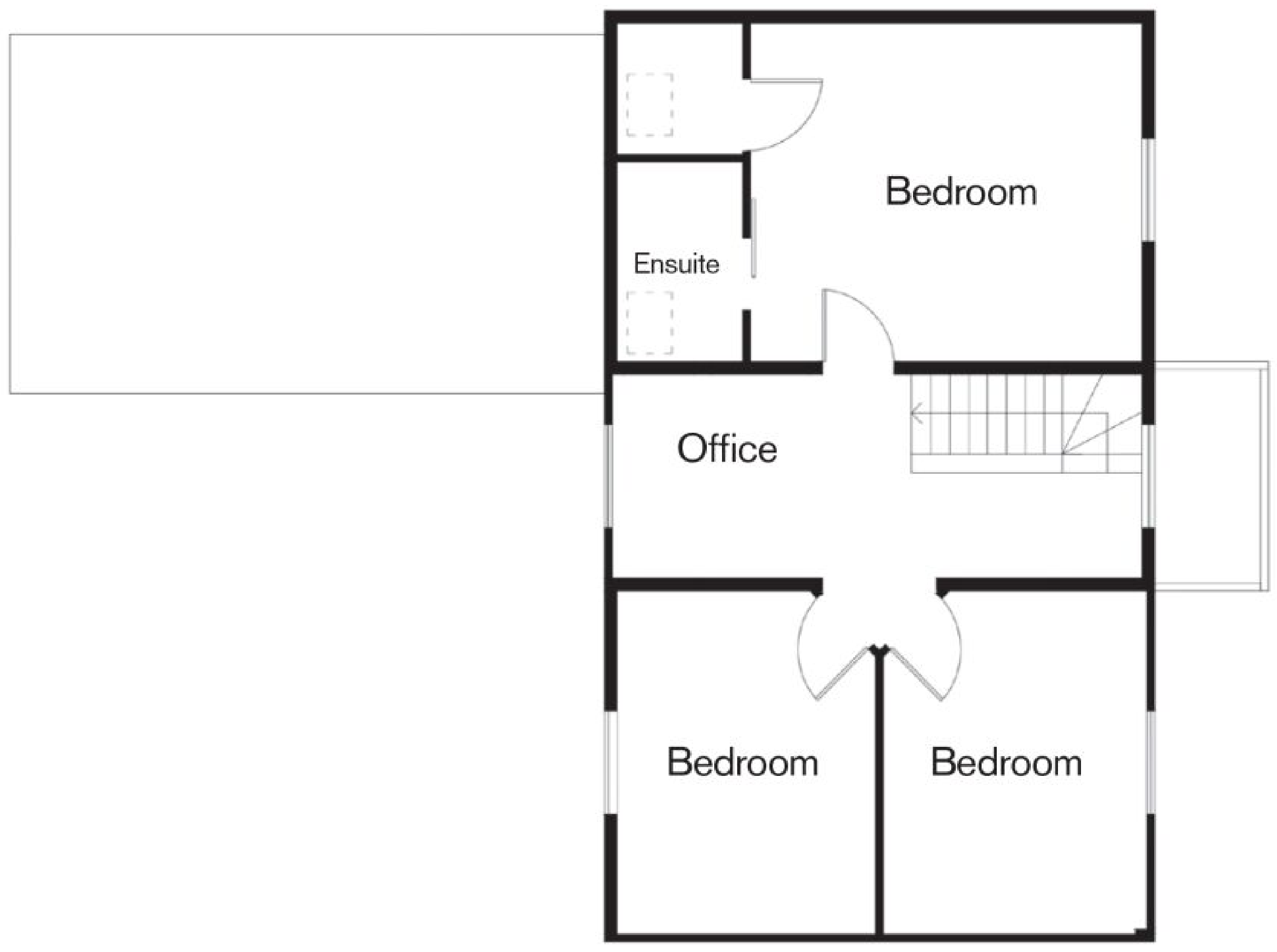
Despite this hiccup, the couple are delighted with their home and in awe of their build team. "They did an amazing job. What was really nice is they all cared about what they were doing," says Katy. "Although Alan and I became accidental self builders and didn't design our home from scratch, the cottage is what we would have chosen and shows an oak frame property isn't just for millionaires. We've gone from rock bottom to living the dream."

Floor plans

Ground floor



First floor



TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m²	Cost %	Total cost
Groundworks & foundations	£119	4%	£20,000
Oak frame	£702	26%	£118,000
Roof	£161	6%	£27,000
Walls & floors	£179	7%	£30,000
Windows & doors	£161	6%	£27,000
Electrics	£59	2%	£10,000
Plumbing	£71	3%	£12,000
General labour	£643	23%	£108,000
Joinery	£119	4%	£20,000
Solar PV	£42	2%	£7,000
Air source heat pump	£71	3%	£12,000
Kitchen	£149	5%	£25,000
Built-in appliances	£24	1%	£4,000
Bathrooms	£89	3%	£15,000
Miscellaneous	£149	5%	£25,000
Grand total			**£460,000**

Note: The costs shown here reflect the original prices for materials, labour and services at the time this project was undertaken. As a general guide, inflation in the construction market runs at about 3%-4% per annum.

Useful contacts

BUILDER **Marston Contracts** 07973 729580 OAK FRAME **Welsh Oak Frame** 01686 688000 www.welshoakframe.com WINDOWS & DOORS **Valdi** 01353 882202 www.valdi.com SOLAR PANELS, HEAT PUMP & UNDERFLOOR HEATING **Green Building Renewables** 080 8175 6950 www.www.greenbuildingrenewables.co.uk SEPTIC TANK **Marsh Industries** 01933 654582 www.marshindustries.co.uk KITCHEN **JN Interiors** 01702 523215 www.jninteriors.co.uk BATHROOMS **Victorian Plumbing,** victorianplumbing.co.uk TILES **Tiles DIY** 01621 840716 www.tilesdiy.co.uk WOODBURNER **Simply Stoves** 01621 772221 www.simplystovesuk.com

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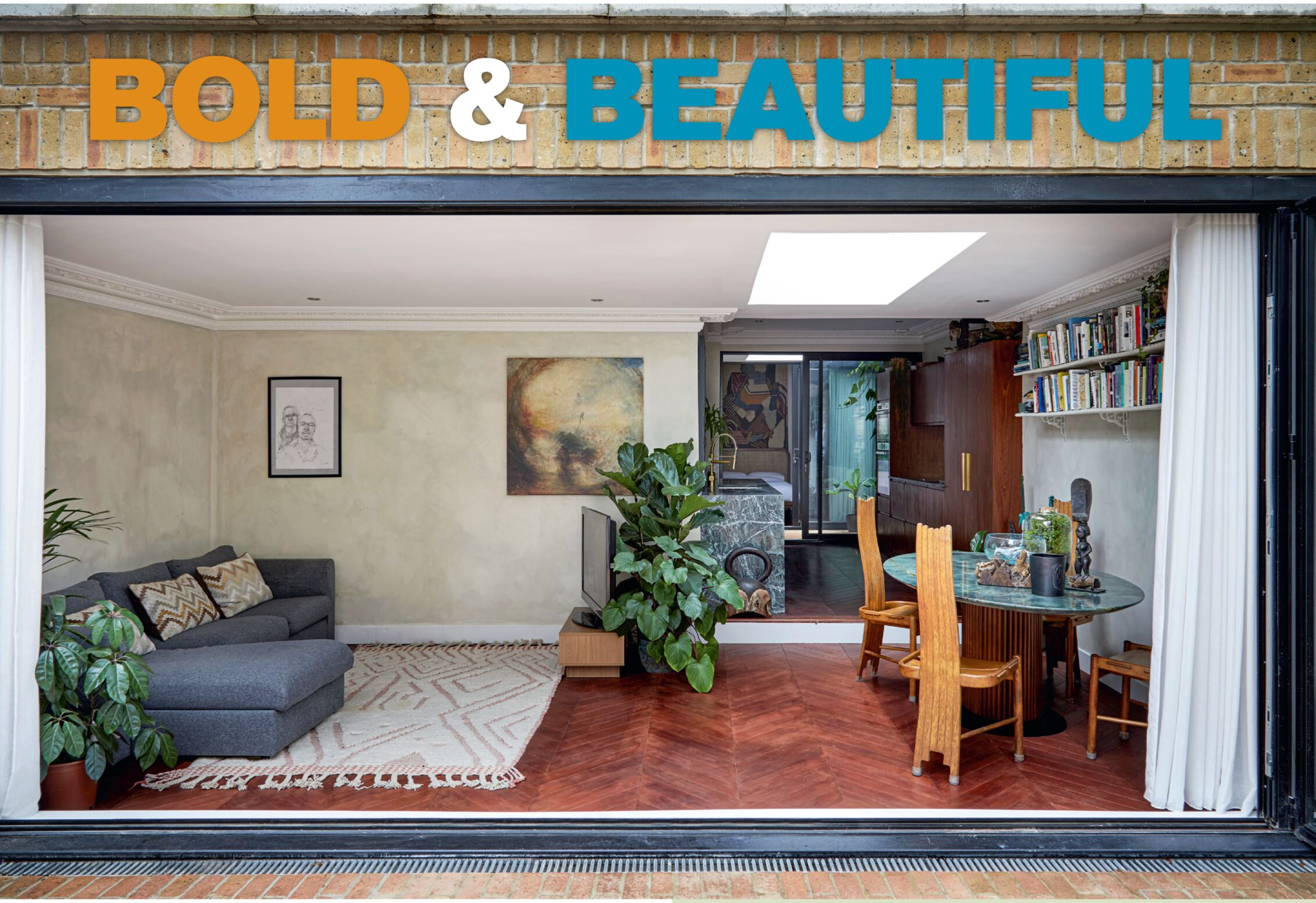


Extending and remodelling their South London Victorian flat has delivered a stylish home for **Blu** and **Corey**, with plenty of wow-factor touches

WORDS **LOUISE PARKIN** PHOTOS **ANNA STATHAKI**

When Blu Reynolds and his partner Corey bought their ground-floor apartment, part of an end-of-terrace Victorian house in Brixton, London, they were keen to infuse it with their own diverse artistic flair. The couple knew significant remodelling would be required to provide the layout they wanted, but lived in the house for a year before making any final decisions to ensure their ideas had time to blossom.

When they moved in, the living room was located at the front of the house and the kitchen to the rear. These main spaces were connected by a cramped corridor, running in an L-shape configuration past the two bedrooms. The main bedroom, set at the back of the house, had no external glazing, instead featuring just a single clerestory window overlooking the kitchen area – from which a small rooflight allowed limited daylight to filter through. The second bedroom was to one side of the property, directly between the living room and kitchen, and this had an ensuite bathroom extending into the garden.

Above: Built in brick and block with a flat roof, a living-dining room has been added to the back of the house, providing a strong connection with the garden via full-width bifold doors

Above: Corey is a keen gardener, and once the dwarf wall and horizontal hit and miss fence had been built, he soon populated beds and borders with stunning plants and flowers

FACT FILE

NAMES Blu Reynolds & Corey

OCCUPATIONS Management consultant & investor

LOCATION Brixton, London

TYPE OF PROJECT Renovation & extension

STYLE Contemporary update to Victorian flat

CONSTRUCTION METHOD Brick & block

PROJECT ROUTE Architect & main contractor

PLOT SIZE 168m²

PROPERTY COST £725,000

BOUGHT 2021

HOUSE SIZE 102m²

PROJECT COST £171,500

PROJECT COST PER M² £1,681

TOTAL COST £896,500

BUILDING WORK COMMENCED September 2022

BUILDING WORK TOOK 56 weeks

CURRENT VALUE £950,000

Above & above right: This new space is drenched in daylight, with a dropped floor level and a green marble tabletop that matches the worktops. The parquet floor has been laid in chevrons to point in the direction you walk in as you enter, creating a subtly welcoming message

Planning permission was already in place for a small brick extension to the rear to provide a living-dining room. The scheme also included the conversion of the front living room to a large master bedroom. However, the lack of daylight in the second bedroom and a shortage of storage space meant that a more creative solution was required.

Design details

Blu and Corey appointed friend and architect Ed Couper to work in collaboration with Lucy Kuhar, of Lumin Architects, with a brief to remodel the apartment's layout, as well as convert the basement into habitable living space. The two designers have worked together on a

Rght: Walnut door fronts have been fitted over Ikea units to create richly toned cupboards on both sides. Green marble worktops reach to the floor on the right side of the kitchen

number of projects across the globe, including at London practice Karakusevic Carson Architects, a house in Australia, community centre in New Zealand and women's shelter in Fiji.

Ed has since returned to his native Australia, while Lucy founded her own practice in 2018, initially in London but now based in Hertfordshire. "When Blu and Corey came to me to ask if I could do their house extension, of course I said yes – and brought in Lucy, who has lots of experience with this kind of project," says Ed.

The first iteration of the plans included digging out the existing small cellar to make space for an ensuite bathroom and walk-in wardrobe for the new master bedroom. Skyrocketing materials and service prices caused by the Covid pandemic, however, meant that the required excavation and underpinning works became unaffordable – with prices rising sharply, from £250 to £400 per m^2.

Developing the plan

With a basement ruled out, Ed and Lucy revisited the existing approved plans. They made amendments to rationalise the layout, introduce more daylight and increase the dimensions of the main accommodation to create a cohesive kitchen-living-dining area. An ensuite bathroom leading off the rear bedroom would be demolished to make way for a new 3.6m-deep flat-roof extension, built in London brick and topped with a modern EPDM membrane.

Aluminium bifold doors would open up the new living space to the garden, enhancing the connection between indoors and out. One of the panels operates as a conventional door, enabling it to double up as the main entrance, with access via a gate into the rear garden. A single large rooflight further enhances natural brightness.

The large living room at the front of the house would still become the master bedroom, but Ed and Lucy were eventually able to include an ensuite by slightly reducing the size of the bedroom and moving the door. They also shaved a few inches off the second bedroom, which meant the hallway could be shunted across, creating space for a compact storage-cum-utility room, flanking the corridor.

Perhaps the most spectacular feature of the new proposal was the glazed internal courtyard, between the kitchen and second bedroom. The addition enhances the open feeling and creates a sense of depth in the apartment, while introducing daylight into the centre of the house and providing both rooms with access to the outdoors. There was even enough space within the revised floorplan for a third bedroom/study.

Above: The new floorplan created space for a small third bedroom, which is used as study/snug and decorated in a vivid blue-green hue, using a mottled paint technique

Right: A bold royal blue paint colour has been chosen for the ceiling, which showcases the pretty ceiling rose and the white modern light fitting – a real feature

Organising the build

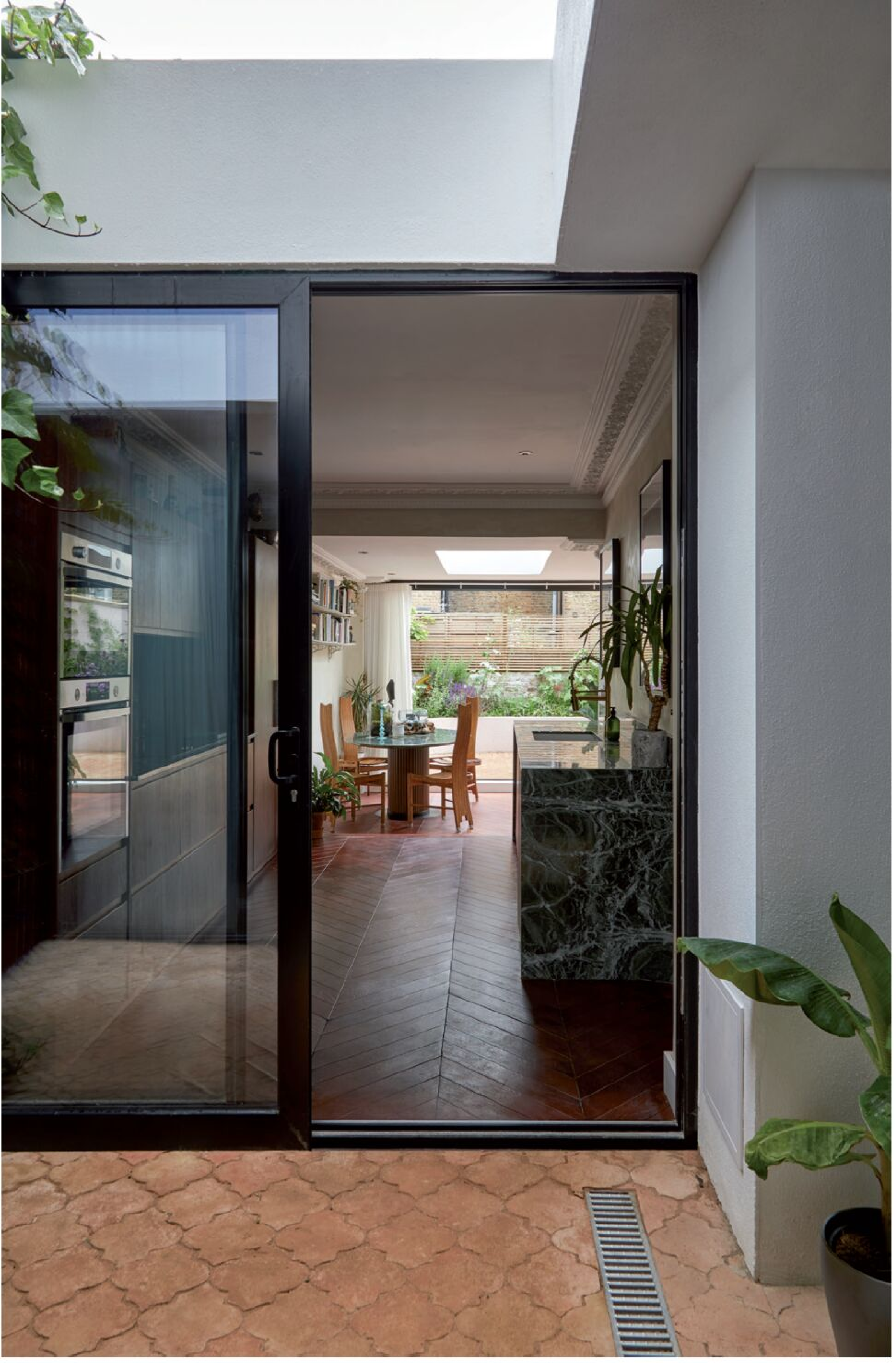
Corey and Blu put their project out to tender, receiving quotes that varied widely between £70,000 and £300,000. Some included materials and services, while others were for labour only. After careful consideration, the couple chose a firm (which has since ceased trading) that quoted £110,000 plus materials.

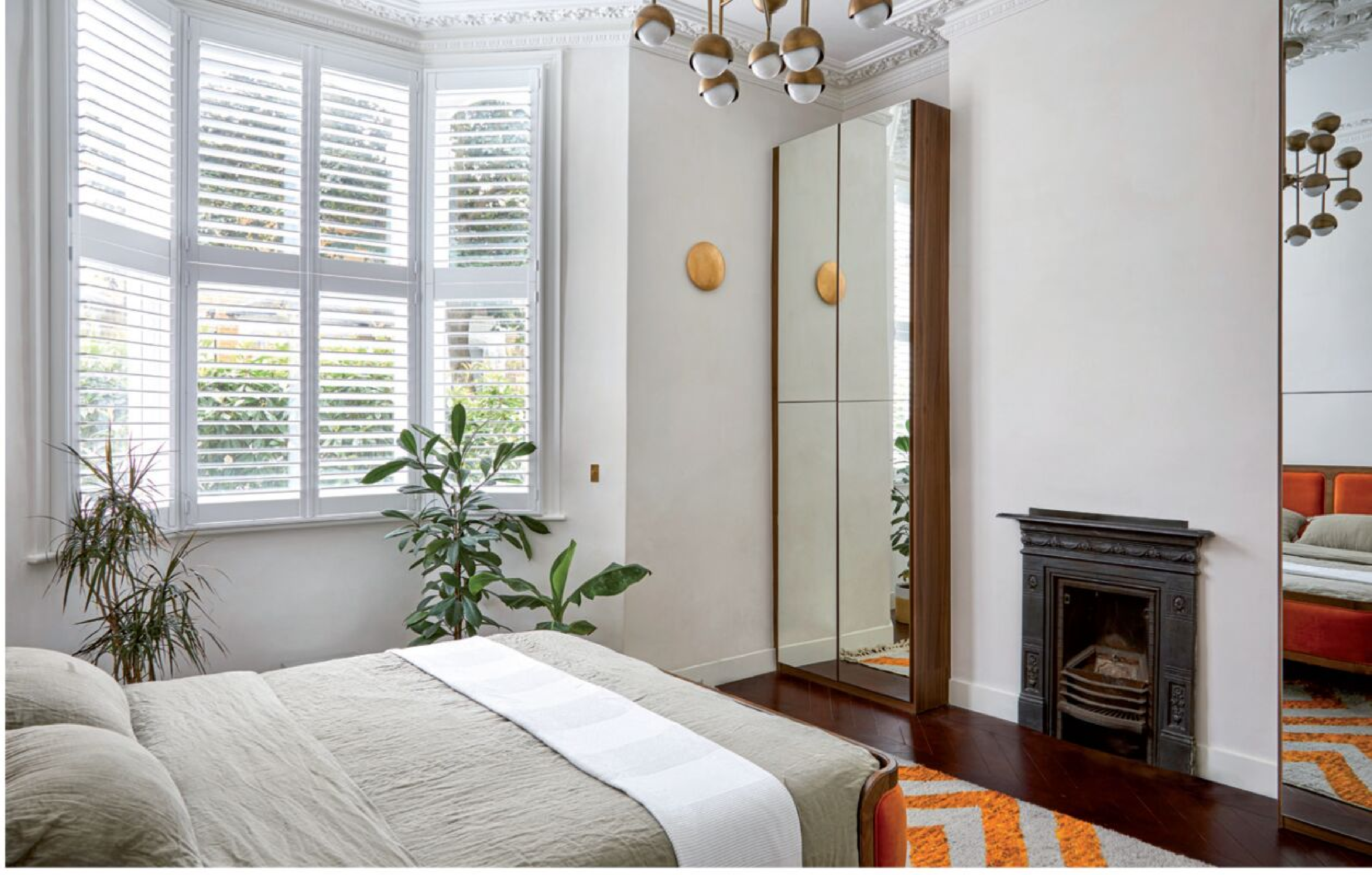
A management consultant in the health care industry, Blu felt confident taking on the role of ordering the materials, products and fittings for the project. Given the lack of space on the tight London site, one of his best decisions was to rent a nearby storage unit, which was invaluable for stocking their purchases, ensuring they'd be ready when the builders needed them. The couple moved into a friend's house for the duration of the building works, popping back to their own home regularly to check in on how the scheme was coming together.

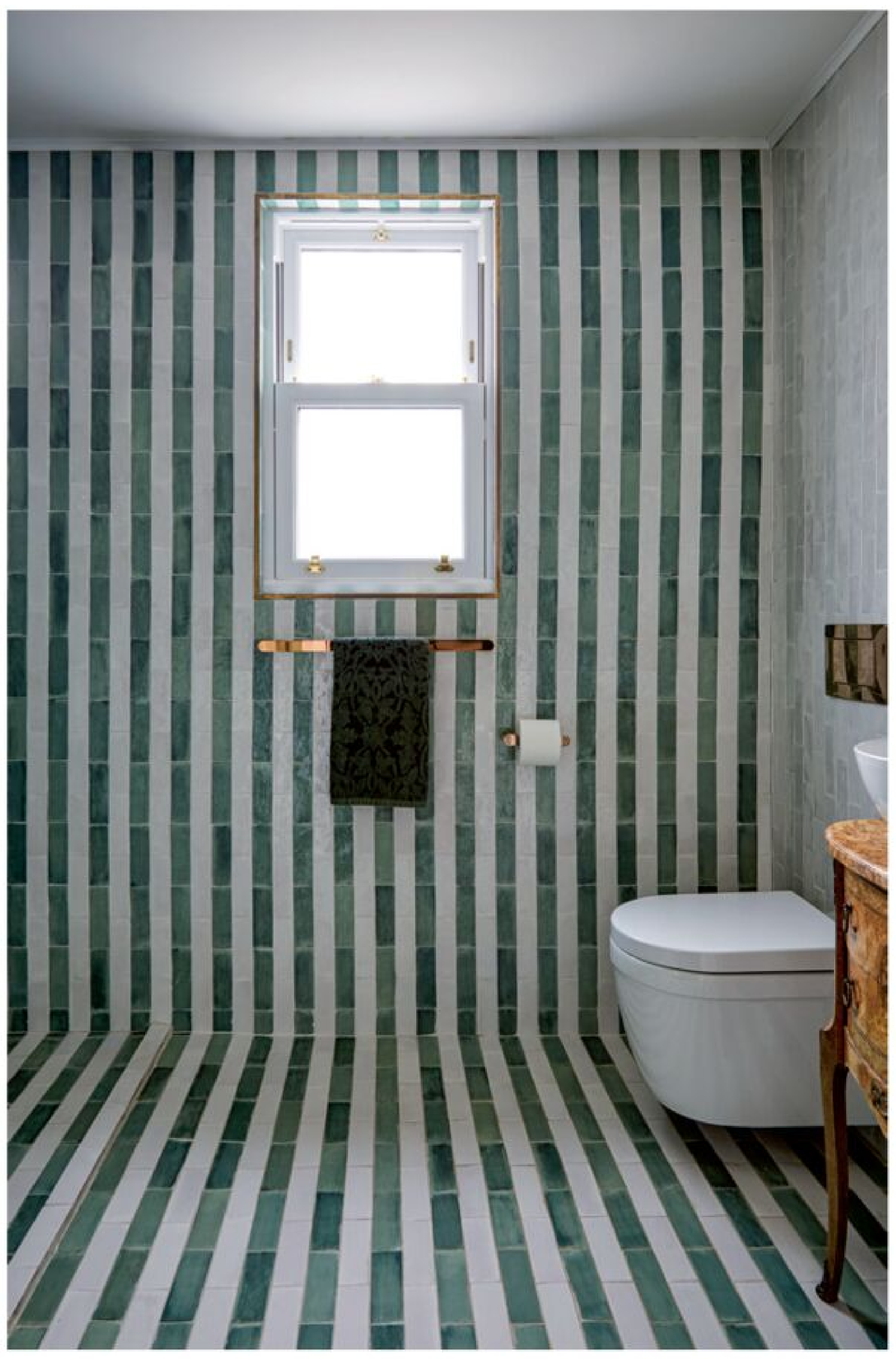
The layout changes meant that most of the internal walls were removed, necessitating the installation of new steel beams. During this work, the structure was buttressed with specialist supports designed by a structural engineer and propping consultant. The foundations were dug at the same time, making for a busy site.

Making spaces

The new kitchen-living-dining room is a light-filled hub, but it's not quite how the couple originally envisaged. Their planning permission stipulated a maximum roof height of 2.83m for the extension, which in turn meant the living-dining area would have to be lower than the original house to achieve adequate ceiling heights. "We had our hearts set on a single floor level throughout the apartment, but this would have meant lowering the floor throughout, costing a fortune," says Blu.





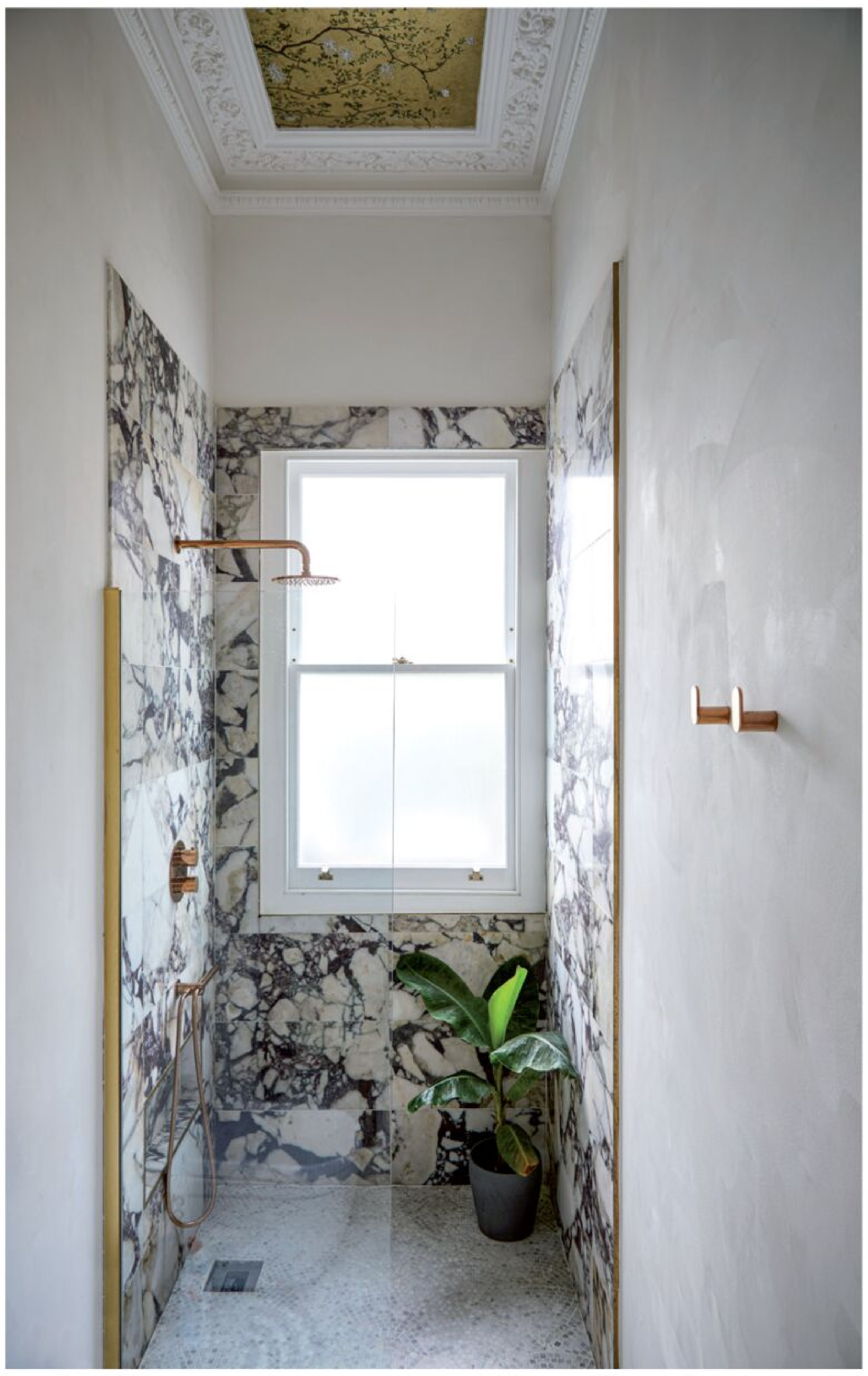


Instead, this zone steps up to the kitchen. "We actually love the difference in floor levels," says Blu. "Plus, the new, light space with bifold doors that open onto the garden is gorgeous in the summer." The kitchen itself has been upgraded with stylish wall cabinets on one side and a striking marble island unit opposite, with waterfall worktops that continue down to the floor.

The flooring – oak parquet in a herringbone pattern – proved difficult to get right, and in some places took more than one attempt to install. Blu and Corey spent six weeks finalising a stain for it that would achieve the depth of colour they wanted, but as they'd ordered the product in advance and kept it in storage, there was time to play with colours. "It would probably have been easier to buy a walnut floor, but I'm extremely picky and had an idea in mind," says Blu. "We mixed so many stains in different quantities until we got the right look."

In addition to the floor, attention to detail shines throughout the house, not least in the decorative finishes. "We have quite different tastes, but are respectful of this and agreed that, unless the other person absolutely hated our choice, we would include it," says Blu. "This has led to us using some fairly bright colours and bold patterns, and we're thrilled with how it's turned out."

Happily, the couple do align on many decorative styles. "Corey likes classical and lavish designs, so we opted for traditional coving in the new living room and added it back into the original parts of the house – to match the existing mouldings and ceiling rose in the master bedroom," says Blu. "We also selected an opulent gold wallpaper in the master ensuite, royal blue in the ceiling of the second bedroom and bold blue-green walls in the study, to offset the use of bright white through other areas of the house."



Tob left: Laid in a beautiful herringbone design, the oak flooring has been stained a deep walnut colour and installed throughout the home's living areas and in the bedrooms

Top right: Converted from a spacious living area, this room has original coving and a ceiling rose, twinned with more modern furniture and fittings, and a walk-in wardrobe

Above: Verdant-hued Fellina Pianta Gloss tiles from Claybrook Studios, laid alongside a paler design from the same range, create a sophisticated look in the main bathroom

Left: Starel Stones' Calacata tiles frame the shower enclosure in the ensuite giving it a luxurious finish closer look

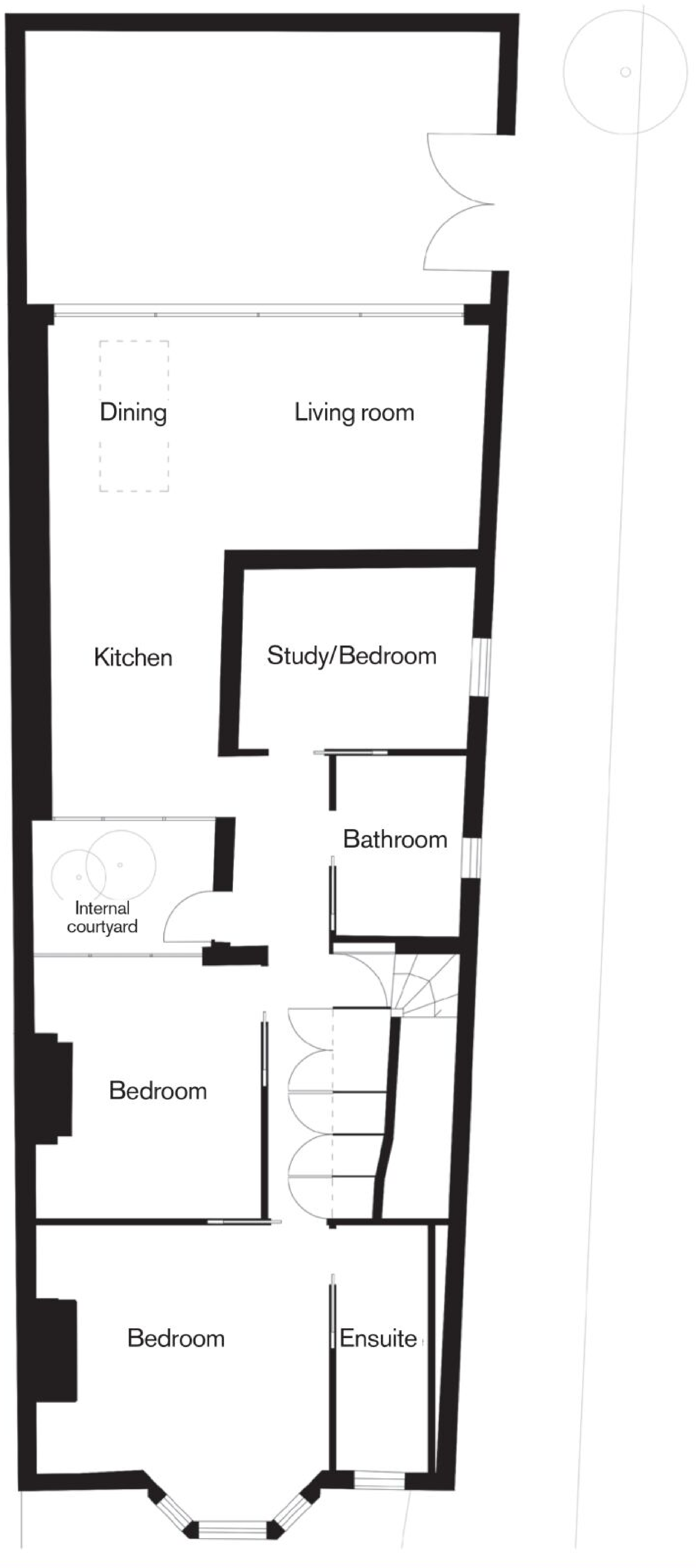
Art takes centre stage…

Blu and Corey, who have been married for almost eight years, take an eclectic approach to art and decor. Keen to inject colour and form into the interior, they've carefully curated the spaces to best showcase their collections. The couple gave a detailed brief to the architects on the desired location of various pieces of artwork and sculpture, to ensure the spaces were designed to accommodate them. The electrical installation was then planned to ensure picture lighting and power sockets were positioned to enable certain pieces to be properly displayed. "We wanted each room to have its own character, bringing life, colour and texture to the spaces. We feel like we have done exactly that, and we are really happy with the result," says Blu.

Displaying artworks

Floor plans

Ground floor



TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m²	Cost %	Total cost
Preliminaries (party wall, demolition, structural engineer)	£245	14%	£25,000
Foundations	£49	3%	£5,000
Walls & roof	£49	3%	£5,000
Windows & doors	£294	17%	£30,000
Plastering & finishes	£147	9%	£15,000
Floors (boards, concrete, carpets)	£196	12%	£20,000
Internal joinery & fittings	£69	4%	£7,000
Bathrooms & kitchen	£196	12%	£20,000
Plumbing	£29	2%	£3,000
Electrics	£15	<1%	£1,500
Decorating	£98	6%	£10,000
Fees	£196	12%	£20,000
External works	£98	6%	£10,000
Grand total			**£171,500**

Note: The costs shown here reflect the original prices for materials, labour and services at the time this project was undertaken. As a general guide, inflation in the construction market runs at about 3%-4% per annum.

Useful contacts

ARCHITECTS **Edward Couper** www.edwardcouper.com **Lumin Architects** 020 3441 0969 www.luminarchitects.com KITCHEN CARCASSES **Ikea** www.ikea.com KITCHEN CABINET DOORS **Holte Studio** 020 7041 6015 www.holte.studio WORKTOP **Quality Marble Granite** 020 8123 5080 www.qmarble-granite.co.uk BOILER **Worcester Bosch** 0330 123 9339 www.worcester-bosch.co.uk BATHROOM TILES **Claybrook Studio** 020 7052 1555 www.claybrookstudio.co.uk ENSUITE TILES **Starel Stones** 01483 973477 www.starelstones.co.uk BATHROOM FITTINGS **Lusso Stone** 020 3370 4057 www.lussostone.com OAK FLOORING **Wood & Beyond** 020 3869 0900 www.woodandbeyond.com LIGHTING **National Lighting** 020 8963 7070 www.nationallighting.co.uk **Soho Home** 020 3819 8199 www.sohohome.com

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11.00	**Designing your dream home**
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12.20	**Renovating a home with character: updating an old house for modern eco living**
13.00	**How to add more space & value**
13.40	**The perfect way to build your home– plus the great build systems debate: PANEL SESSION**
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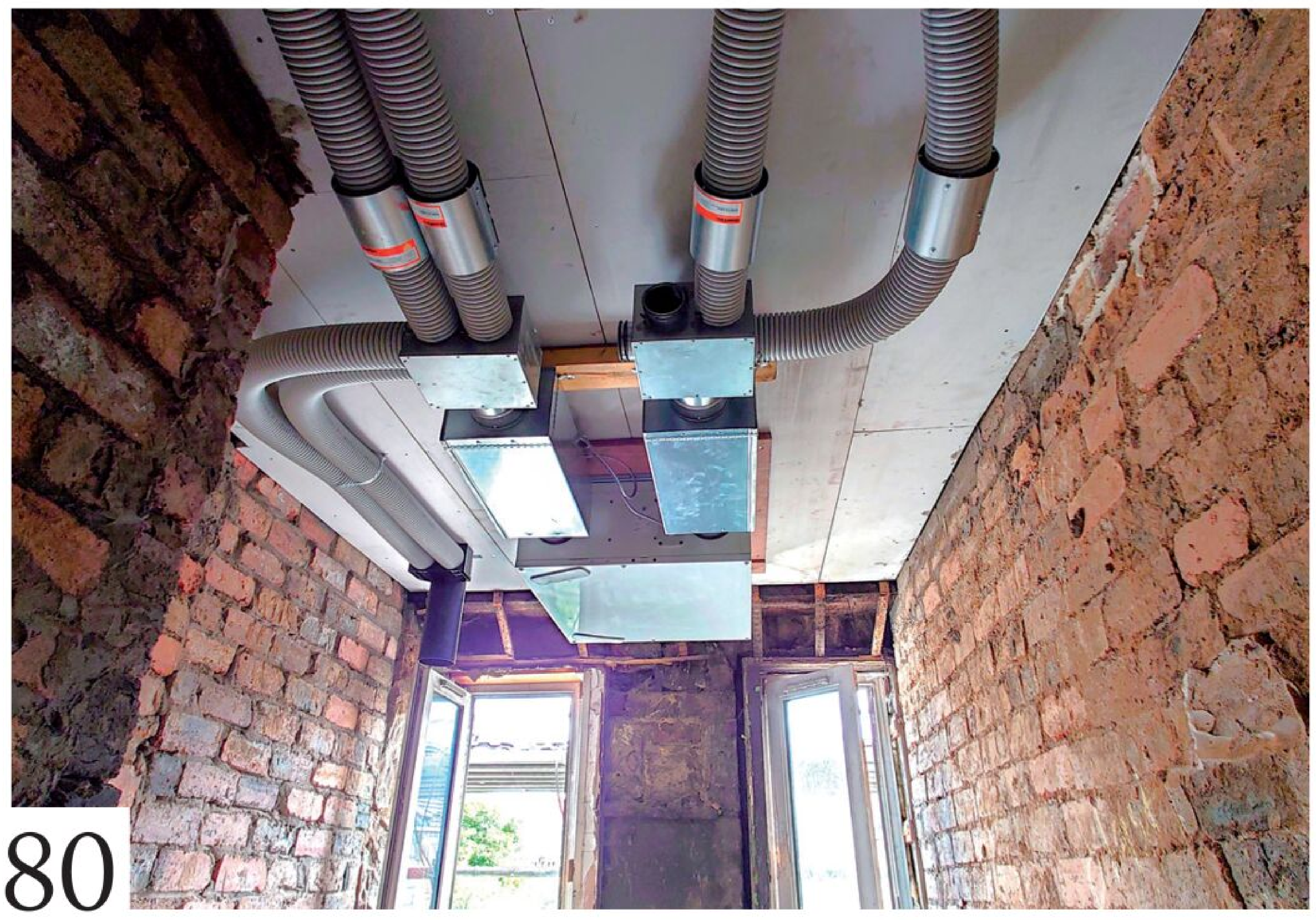

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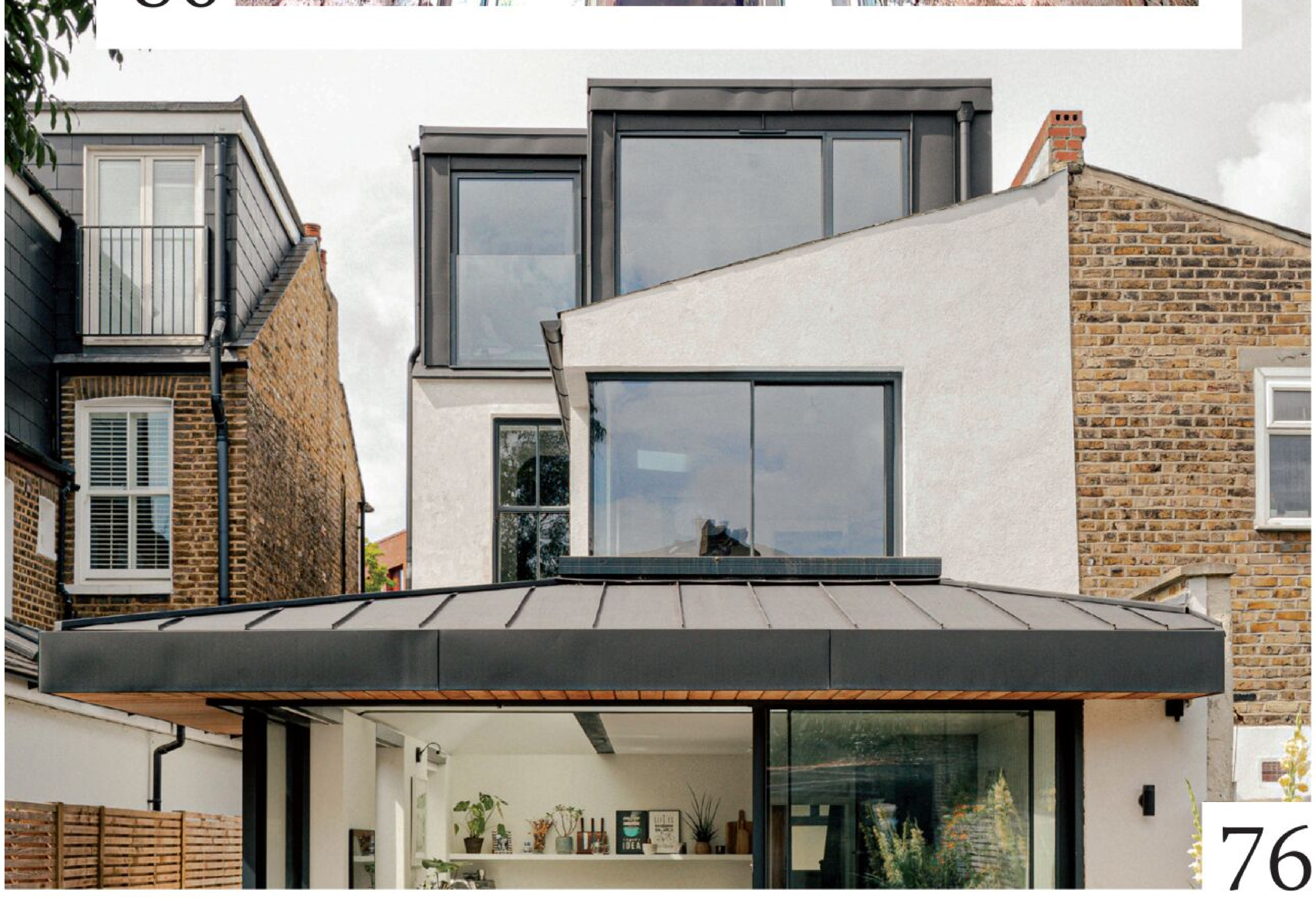

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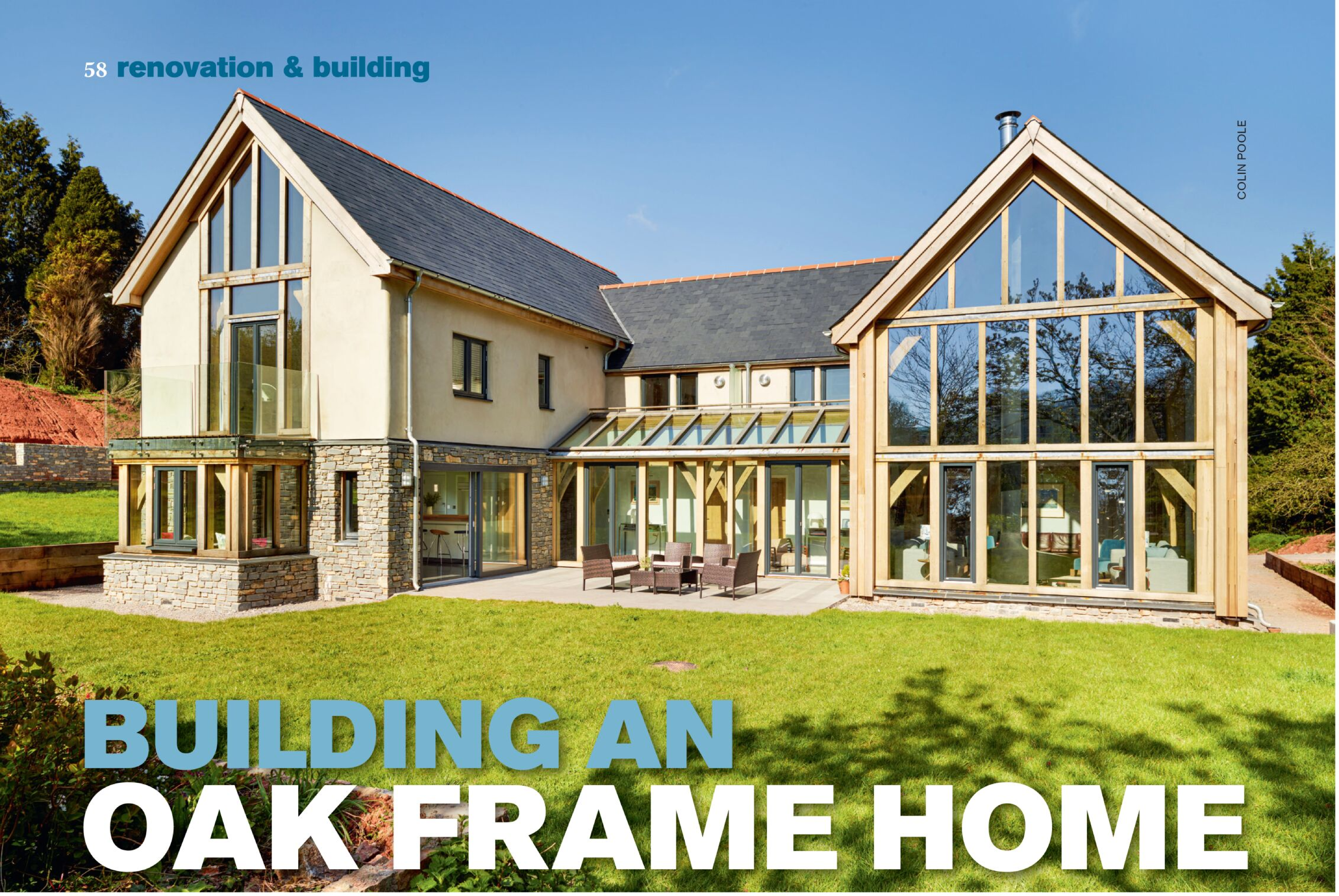

COLIN POOLE

BUILDING AN OAK FRAME HOME

From its design possibilities to sustainability credentials, **Scarlett Deamer** explores the benefits of this beautiful structural system

Above & right: This stunning house in Torquay, designed by Roderick James Architects, combines clean, contemporary lines with the traditional handcrafted character of exposed oak. The generous face glazing set within the oak frame creates bright spaces flooded with natural daylight

Oak has been one of the UK's most popular building materials for centuries and continues to be used by self builders today to create stylish and thermally-efficient homes. Here I'm looking at the ins and outs of this build system to help you decide if it's the right choice for your next project. Among the benefits we'll be looking at in more detail are:

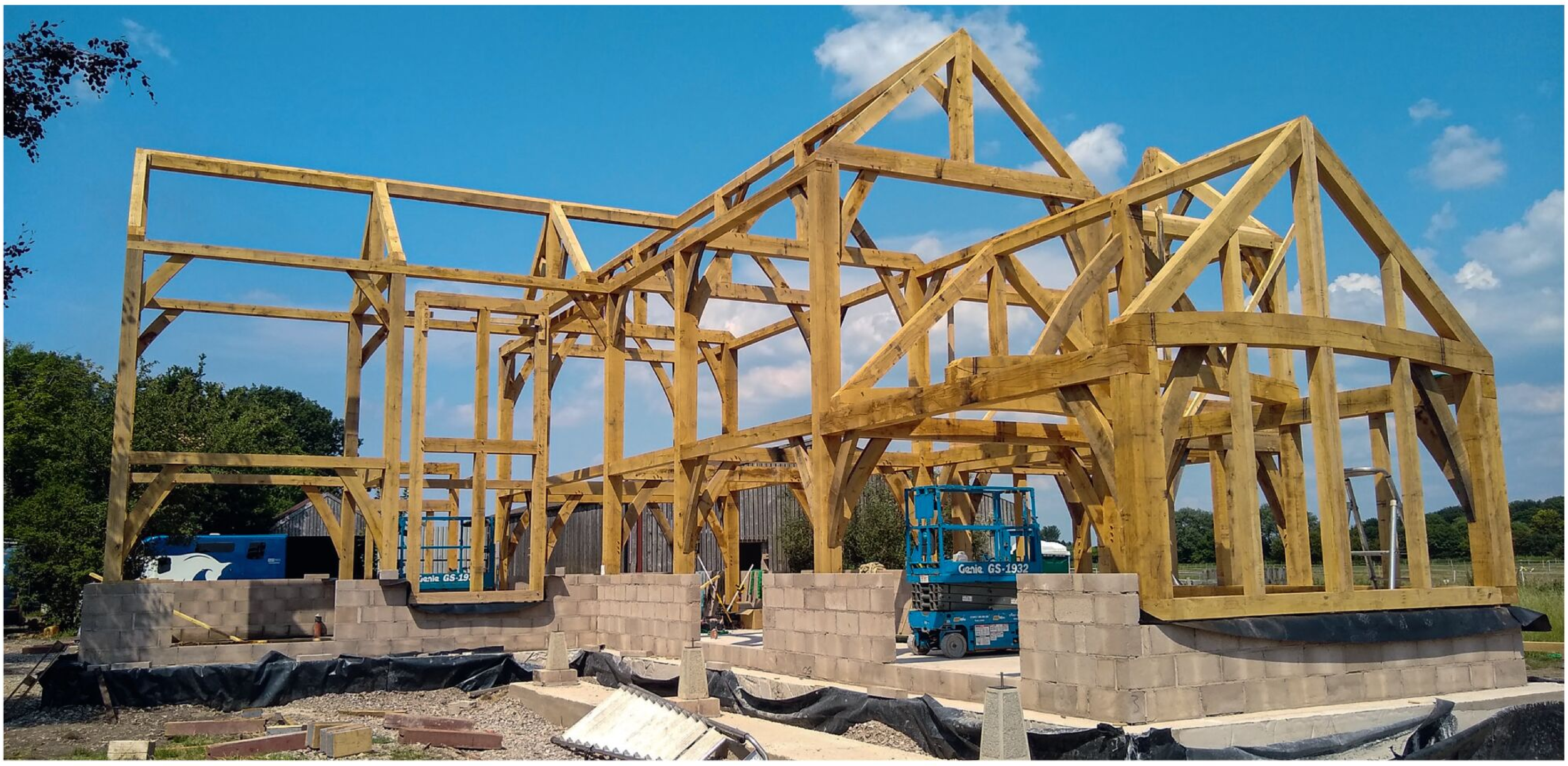
● Impressive design possibilities ● High performance system ● Naturally sustainable ● Quick build times ● Attractive to potential buyers.

Design options

When creating your oak frame home, you can either work with your own designer or engage the supplier's in-house architectural team. Their designers will have extensive knowledge of oak construction, and if you like the scheme you'll then buy the frame directly from that company.

Oak can be used to craft many different architectural styles, whether you're aiming for a classic country cottage or ultra-modern home. Certain techniques can be applied to emphasise the material in line with your preferred aesthetic. For example, traditional homes often feature large, exposed beams to create a rustic feel, while more contemporary designs might use oak more sparingly, focusing only on key timbers and concealing smaller beams. "The detailing of the frame can also be adapted to fit your design – having traditional pegged joints or adding portions of steelwork will all have a big influence on the ultimate feel and appearance of the building," says James Lock, partner at Roderick James Architects.

Building with oak can also give you the opportunity to incorporate some real wow-factor features into your project's design. Bright open-plan spaces, statement mezzanines or grand stairwells beautifully showcase the oak frame, while expansive glazing will not only maximise natural light levels but also frames any scenic views you want to feature. "Large, glass panels work effectively alongside oak frames, creating a light-filled space that showcases the natural material. Try using glazing with minimal framing if you want the structure to remain the star feature," says Emma Hamilton, marketing manager at Oakmasters.



Above: A structural skeleton, by Carpenter Oak, awaiting encapsulation. After this stage, the roofing and cladding will be installed to create a weathertight building envelope

Construction details

Once you've selected your design and supplier, the frame will be crafted in the supplier's offsite workshop or factory. Specialised machinery precisely cuts the oak, reducing material waste, saving costs and lowering environmental impact. Some oak frame suppliers still offer handcrafted jointing techniques, for ultimate authenticity.

Upon arrival at the site, the frame can be assembled very quickly. "Typically, it takes around one to two weeks to erect the oak frame," explains Helen Needham, head of architecture at Oakwrights. An encapsulation system is then usually installed, providing an insulated wrapper for the building. This is what your choice of exterior cladding will be battened back onto. Some suppliers offer their encapsulation systems, for example WrightWalll and WrightWall Natural from Oakwrights, while others use externally-sourced panelised timber or structural insulated panel (SIPs) systems. This phase typically takes around a week to fully complete.

The accelerated construction timeline streamlines site management and allows other trades to begin work sooner. Turnkey projects can be completed in as little as nine months – meaning you can start enjoying your home sooner than with more site-based build methods, such as blockwork.

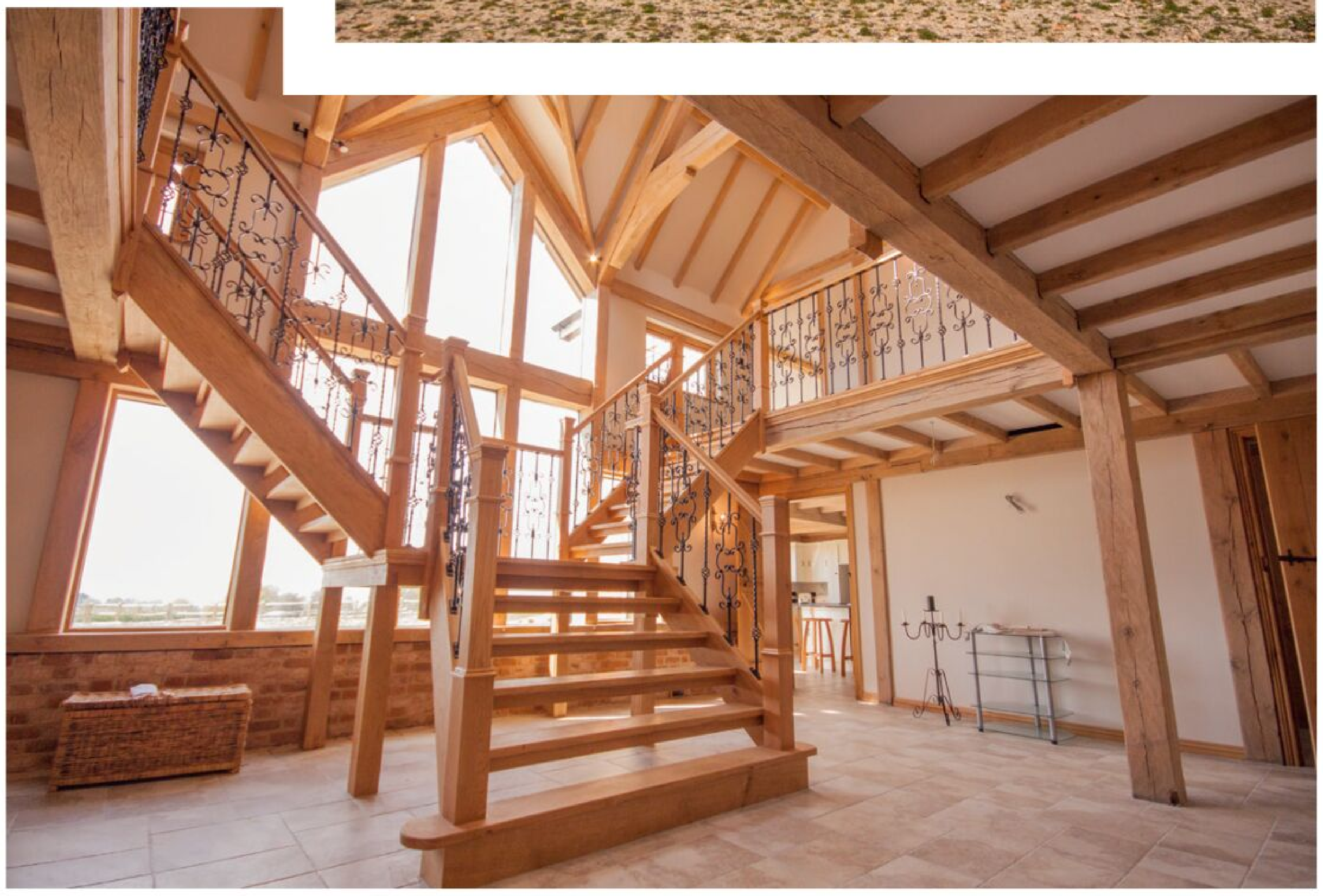
Sustainability & energy efficiency

Oak frame construction offers substantial sustainability benefits, starting with the material's low environmental impact. "The carbon footprint of producing and working with oak is significantly lower than steel or concrete," says Helen.

Beyond the production phase, an oak home continues to contribute to sustainability throughout its lifespan. "Oak helps to sequester carbon as it grows, locking it in for the duration of the building's lifetime," says Juliette Lessware, marketing and communications officer at Carpenter Oak. This combination of low emissions during production and the long-term carbon storage benefits makes oak an excellent choice for eco-conscious self builders. You need to make sure to choose a supplier that sources its materials from sustainable, well-managed forests.

In conjunction with a quality encapsulation system, oak is able to deliver great insulation and airtightness values – and can even be used to achieve Passivhaus standards. "It's challenging but is achievable with careful design.

Left: Set within the Sussex countryside, Oakmasters created this timeless manor house, installing the frame, joinery and glazing in just eight weeks. It features classic vaulted ceilings, double-glazed gables and a wow-factor, fully visible structural oak frame



MARK WELSH

LIVING IN AN OAK HOME

In 2015, Rupert and Lindsay Osborn brought their vision to life by building a contemporary oak frame home with the help of Oakwrights, set in a picturesque Suffolk village. Years down the line, they remain just as enamoured with their self build as they were the day it was completed. "We haven't changed anything since it was first built," says Lindsay.

Their key piece of advice for future oak frame homeowners is to be patient with both decoration and maintenance. "Avoid filling in any gaps too soon, as the oak will naturally shrinks during its first year," Rupert explains. "After a few years, once the frame has settled, you can then begin to address any minor cosmetic issues you find."

The Osborn's home features large areas of glazing which complement the oak frame beautifully. The warm, rustic character of the wood harmonises with the surrounding landscape. "Even in the middle of winter, it feels like you're sitting in the garden," says Lindsay. "Yet, thanks to our home's excellent airtightness, there's no draught."

Finally, they appreciate how the external cladding has aged gracefully, developing a natural silver patina, while the interior's exposed oak beams have retained their original colour and charm.

To find out more Rupert and Lindsay's story, check out episode 24 of Oakwrights' In the Frame podcast series.

Incorporating advanced insulation, airtightness detailing, and energy-efficient glazing alongside the frame can help to bring a project up to certified specifications," says Emma. If you're achieving a good standard of energy performance and airtightness, you'll typically need to specify a mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) system for a constant supply of fresh, filtered air that ensures a healthy living environment.

How much does an oak home cost?

Prices will largely be determined by size, complexity and whether you chose to manage the rest of the project yourself or opt for a turnkey package. "A two-storey oak frame build can be completed for around £3,000+ per m^{2}, whereas single-storey homes are slightly more costly at £3,500+ per m^{2}," says Helen. "A bespoke package service is more likely to start from £3,200 per m^{2}, but you will benefit from the added security that an expert team will manage the design, build and fit-out for you."

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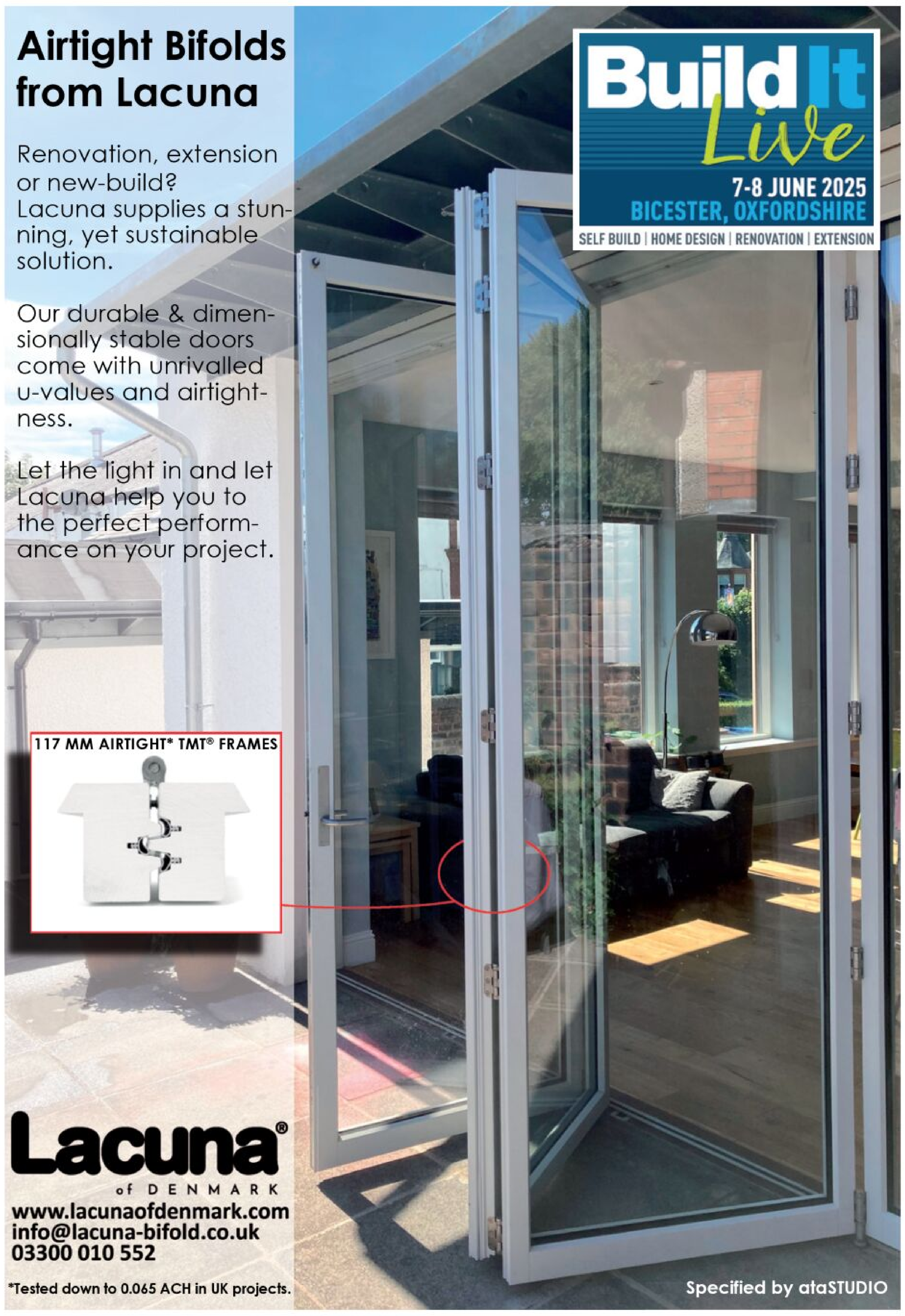
While oak can be a more expensive route than using conventional brick and block, it does offer great value. "An oak frame can be erected in just a few days and be made wind and watertight within just weeks, meaning you are paying less in labour costs and minimising delays caused by the weather," says Juliette. Overall, while the upfront costs may be higher, the long-term financial and practical advantages can make it a smart investment.

Indeed, oak offers a great return on your initial build and fit-out costs. "The rustic charm of an exposed oak home will often really appeal to buyers, in turn meaning they can sell for higher prices than your build costs," says James. Additionally, its durability and timeless appeal means these houses are often seen as a long-term investment. With proper maintenance, an oak home can retain its beauty and value, making it an excellent choice for both current homeowners and future buyers.

There are also ways of reducing costs when it comes to the design of your home, while still benefitting from the warmth and charm of oak. "Choosing a simpler roof style, reducing any bespoke joinery and being strategic about where you place the beams are all smart ways to manage a budget while still achieving that oak-framed character," says Helen. You can also opt for a hybrid system, whereby the most wow-factor parts of the structure are made from oak – a glazed gable, perhaps – and others from timber frame or similar options, to help minimise costs.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Wood-effect flooring

Sleek, shiny and hyper realistic, the walnut-effect Dolce laminate flooring from B&Q is easy to maintain and quick to install, with a simple glueless click fitting. Priced at **£19 per m²**, the durable product is a great, cost-effective option for bathrooms, kitchens and living zones. **(www.diy.com)**

Characterful, timeless and versatile, timber flooring is a favourite amongst self builders and renovators, but is it possible to replicate the real deal without the upkeep and price tag? Sander Tel explores the various options

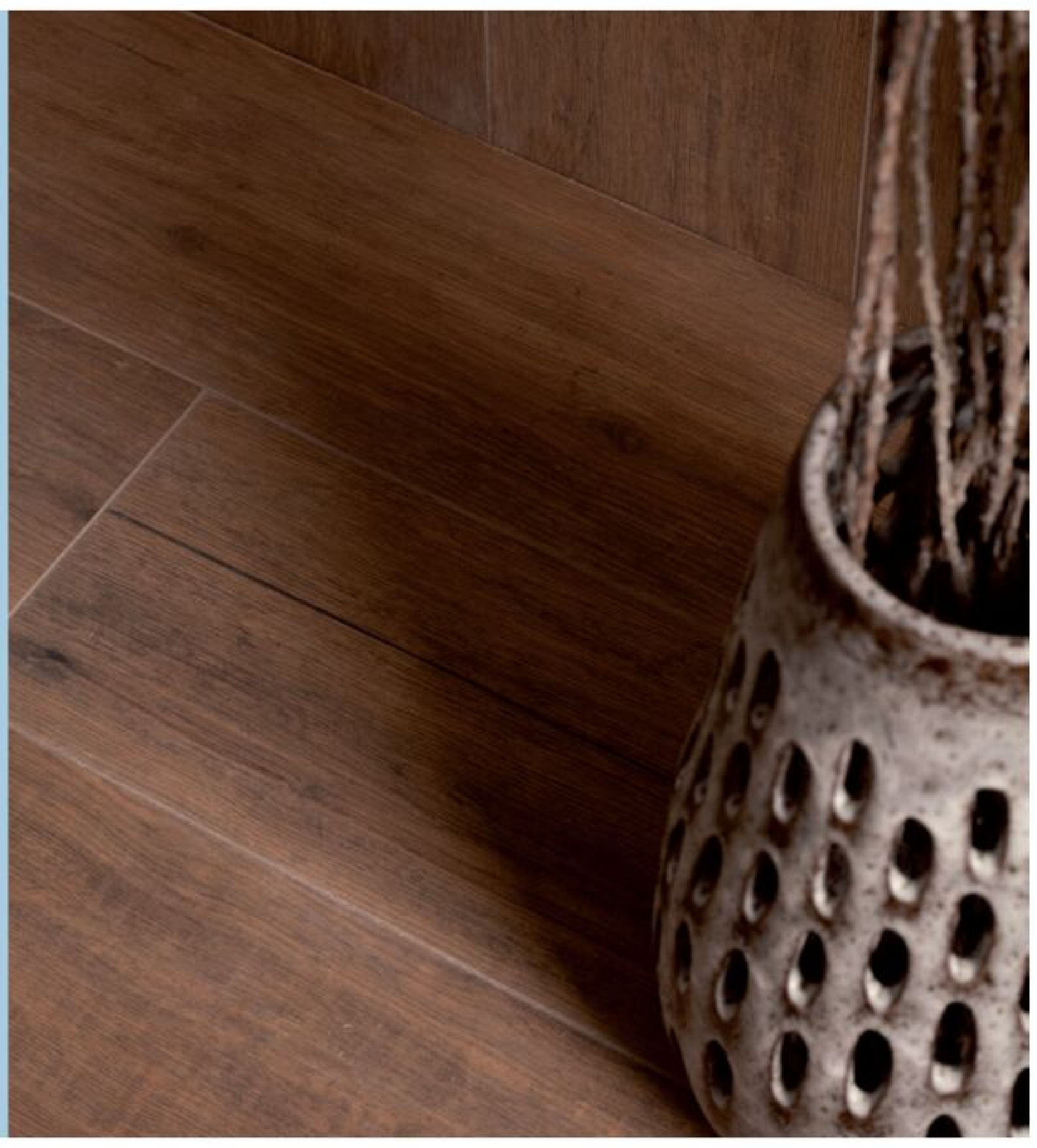
Choosing the right flooring for each room is one of the most important decisions you'll make when designing your home. Whether you opt for classic flagstone tiles or rustic timber, the material you choose will matter. The floor forms the foundation of a room's character – and it can completely transform how the space feels and functions, setting the tone for everything from the furniture to the lighting.

Wood flooring remains a popular choice – and for good reason. It offers natural warmth, character and versatility. It complements a wide range of styles and, with proper care, can last for years. But what if real timber just doesn't suit your space, lifestyle or budget? Here I've rounded up a collection of wood-alternative solutions, all designed to replicate the look of real timber – from porcelain to vinyl.

Stylish, hard-wearing, compatible with underfloor heating, and 100% waterproof, the Trendtime 10 vinyl flooring from Parador is ideal for busy family areas, like kitchens and bathrooms. Created from individual (left and right) strips that mimic the aesthetic of classic chevron wood, the vinyl flooring system can be adhered directly to your build's subfloor, allowing for precise pattern placement. Measuring just 2.5mm thick, the product is perfect for retrofit scenarios as it guarantees minimal floor build-up. Pictured here in Oak Oxford Sanded. **(www.parador.de/en)**

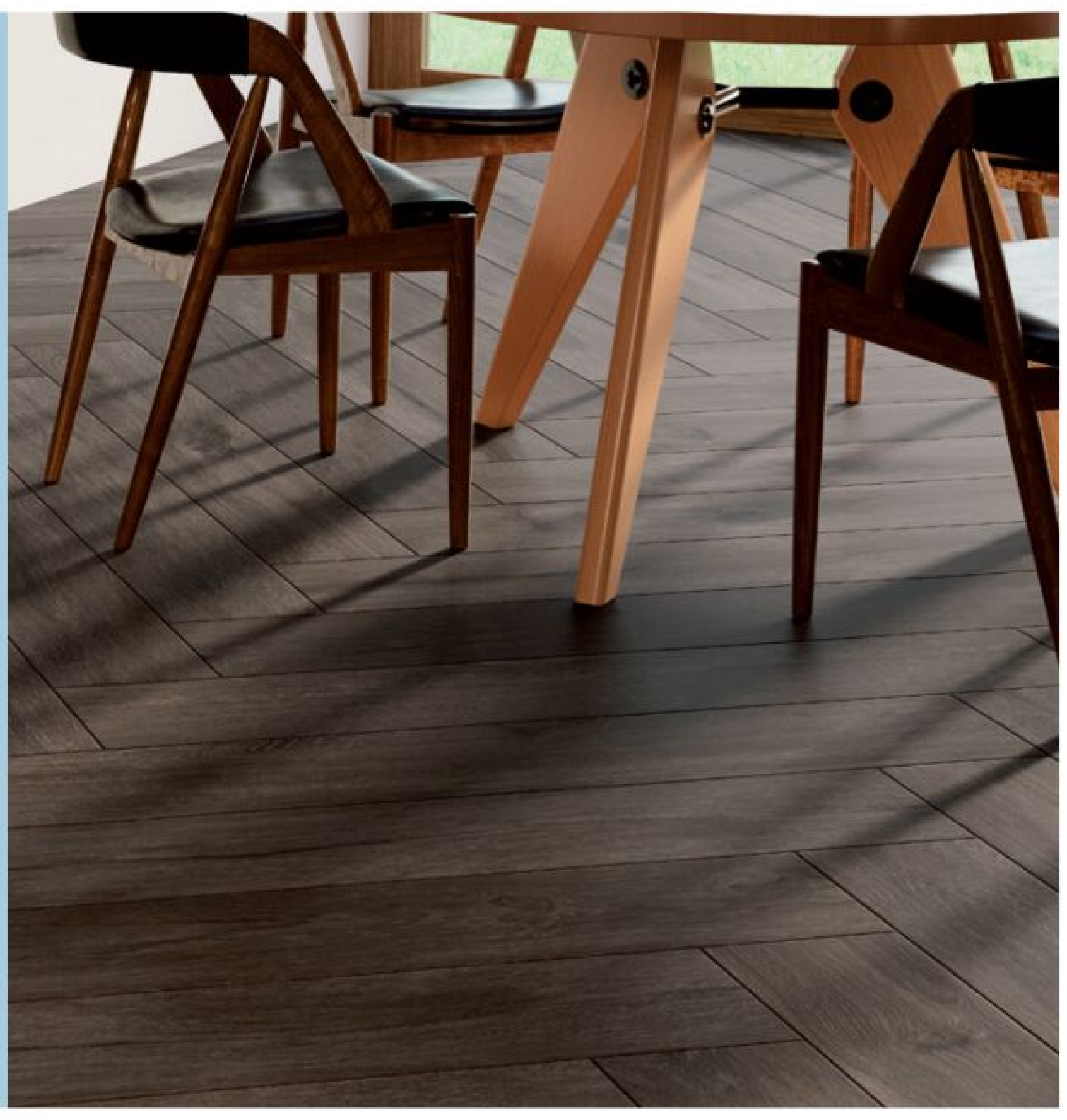
Flooring Superstore's Asenso Signature Versailles flooring offers the sought-after, timeless appeal of traditional French parquet flooring , while being waterproof, scratch resistant and easy to maintain – making it an apt choice for busy hallways or high-traffic areas inside the house. Shown here in Forest Oak, the stick-down luxury vinyl tiles are priced at **£44.99 per m². (www.flooringsuperstore.com)**

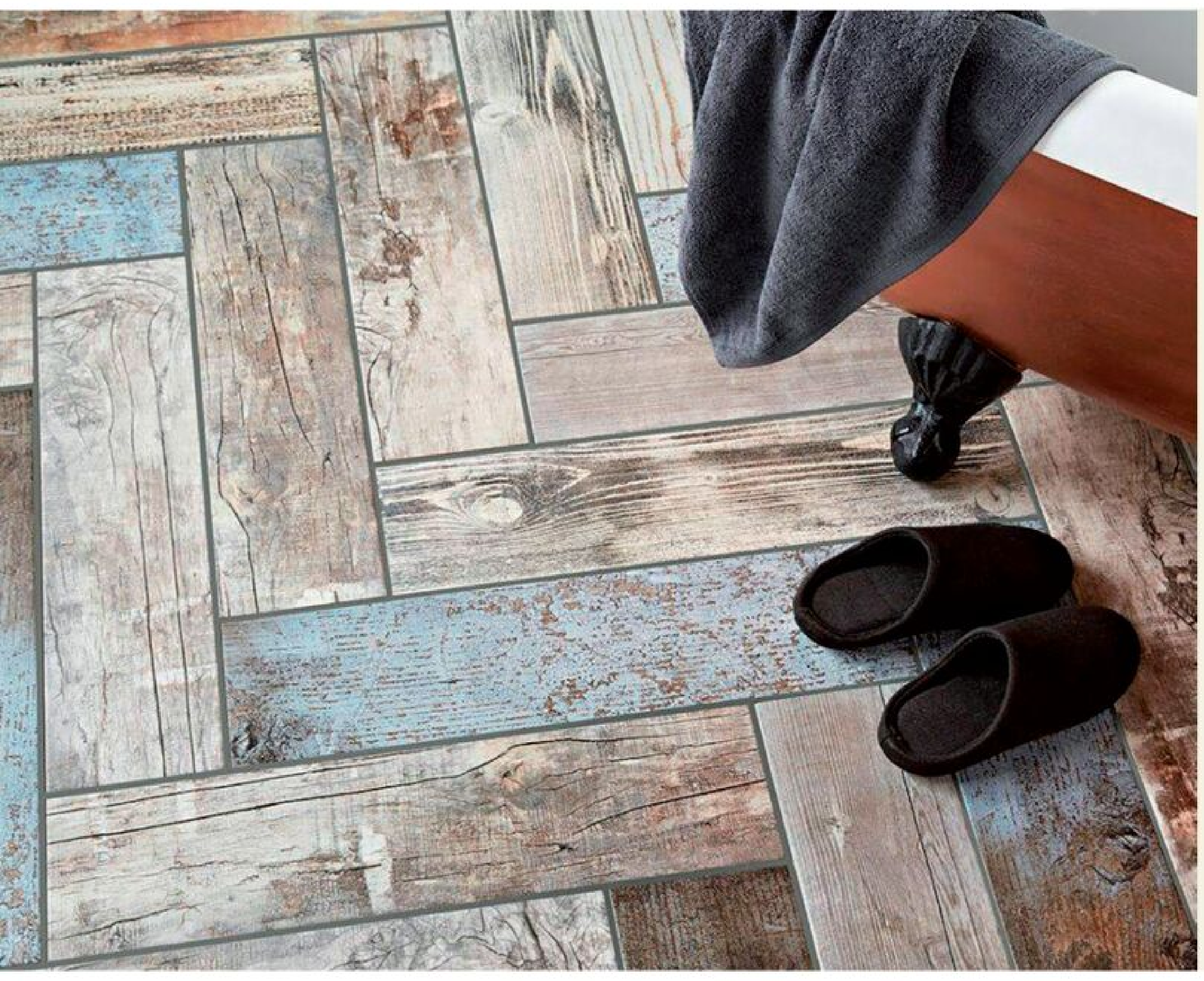
The Peronda FS Bark porcelain tiles (20 x 120cm) from Tile of Spain perfectly emulate the natural warmth, charm and versatility of oak flooring in a dark honey tone. The 9mm-thick tiles are suitable for both indoor and outdoor use, and can be used on both floors and walls – ideal for those looking to make a design statement or create a seamless transition between house and garden. **(www.tileofspain.com)**



Created using high-strength porcelain, and with optimal resistance against water stains, the Ascot oak wood-effect tile from Porcelain Superstore is a good option for those looking to replicate timber floors with a tile-format product. The realistic wood grain effect has a slight texture that mimics the tactility of natural oak, and its durable properties mean the flooring is suitable in any room. **£25.20 per m^2. (www.porcelainsuperstore.co.uk)**

Suitable for both wall and floor applications, the Pine Brown wood-effect porcelain from Tile Warehouse is a charming, realistic and low-maintenance flooring option. The tiles team well with underfloor heating, too, provided you've installed a compatible substrate, and flexible, cement-based adhesives and grouts are used. **£23.98 per m^2. (www.tilewarehouse.co.uk)**





Depending on your interior scheme, a more rustic, aged wood finish, such as the Reclaimed wood-effect floor tiles from Walls and Floors, may suit the room better. Made with quality porcelain and complete with a matt finish, the tonal, worn-looking planks are available in eight different designs. Priced at **£26.95 per m^2. (www.wallsandfloors.co.uk)**

WHICH MATERIAL IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Whether you're working on a new bespoke home or updating a kitchen with a modern extension, choosing the right flooring involves asking the right questions. Will the space include underfloor heating (UFH)? Is it a high-traffic area, perhaps with children or pets? What's your budget? What's the overall aesthetic of the room? Your answers will help guide you towards the option that best suits your project and lifestyle. Here are the pros and cons of three popular materials:

LAMINATE

Laminate flooring is a cost-effective and versatile solution that can mimic the appearance of wood, stone or tile. It's a popular material for spaces like living areas, bedrooms and hallways thanks to its low-maintenance nature and its ability to help reduce noise and prevent draughts. Typically constructed with a high-density fibreboard core and finished with a protective, moisture-resistant layer, laminate is easy to install and doesn't require waxing, polishing, or sealing. While it may not be as long-lasting as some other flooring types, it's a practical choice – just be sure to check the thickness and AC wear rating to ensure it's well suited to your particular space.

PORCELAIN TILES

This flooring option is available in a wide range of styles, colours and finishes, many of which seek to replicate natural materials like wood and stone. They're waterproof, slip-resistant and are a fantastic partner for UFH, too. "Wood-effect porcelain tiles are a cost-effective, durable and aesthetically pleasing wood alternative," says Maria D Arráez, director at Tile of Spain UK. "When compared to real timber, they're highly resistant to scratching and moisture, meaning they are perfectly suited to a wide range of applications and rooms, including outdoor areas." Porcelain is low-maintenance, too. "Simply sweeping, vacuuming and mopping with a mild detergent will keep the porcelain looking as good as new," says Maria. "Whilst real timber materials are more accident and scratch-prone than porcelain, for example, you should still try to clean any spills promptly in order to prolong the life of the flooring."

VINYL

Made from a synthetic, petroleum-based material, this option is water-resistant, making it ideal for bathrooms and kitchens. Available in tiles (known as LVT) or sheet form, the options vary depending on your budget and design goals. "Vinyl options excel in resilience, performance over time and ease of maintenance," says Christoph Wellekötter, head of product management at Parador. "There are various different misconceptions about vinyl and LVT, notably that they are cheap-looking and not hardwearing. While this may have been the case years ago, vinyl has advanced significantly in design prowess and its technical characteristics." Vinyl offers great benefits over timber flooring at a much lower price point. "It is able to deliver the authentic look of wood, with added benefits, such as durability, water resistance and increased sound insulation," says Christoph. It's slip-resistant, too, and compatible with UFH, provided temperatures are controlled carefully during use."

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Above: The Unico System's outlets are exceptionally discreet – barely visible here at the top of the wall above the stairwell – freeing up space to achieve your interior design goals, such as prioritising natural light and views

Designing a healthy & comfortable home

The Unico System's **Richard Soper** shares his expert advice on the steps you can take on your project journey to achieve a high-quality living environment

If you're setting out on the journey to create your dream home, chances are it's somewhere you plan to spend a lot of your time – whether enjoying family life, entertaining friends, working from home or simply relaxing in your new pad. It makes sense, then, to put comfort and wellbeing front and centre in your project brief.

Happily, planning a healthy home is more straightforward than you might think. From the materials you use in the build to how you choose to heat, ventilate and cool your living space, here are some key principles to consider that will put you on the path to a creating better, more enjoyable home.

Maximising light & views

Access to daylight is known to support our health, so designing it into your project from the start is a vital step. Indeed, with good design your project can deliver natural brightness while preserving privacy, reducing your reliance on artificial lighting, and capturing wonderful garden and countryside vistas from different aspects of the building. It can even add wow factor – providing views through the property or highlighting special features.

Good daylighting starts with considering the orientation of the house within its setting – and that doesn't have to apply only to new builds. An extension, for instance, could feature an angled gable end to take full advantage of views and ensure your addition bathes in sunshine exactly when you want it. Your glazing choices are key, too, with options such as rooflights, lanterns and high-level windows encouraging top-down natural light that can penetrate deeper into the core of a building than standard windows.

High-performance modern glazing delivers excellent energy efficiency, too, enabling the use of large spans of near-frameless windows and sliding doors – although it's wise to consider overheating risk when specifying significant amounts of glass. Shading systems and solar control coatings can help here, as can your choice of indoor air handling system.

Thermal comfort: heating & cooling

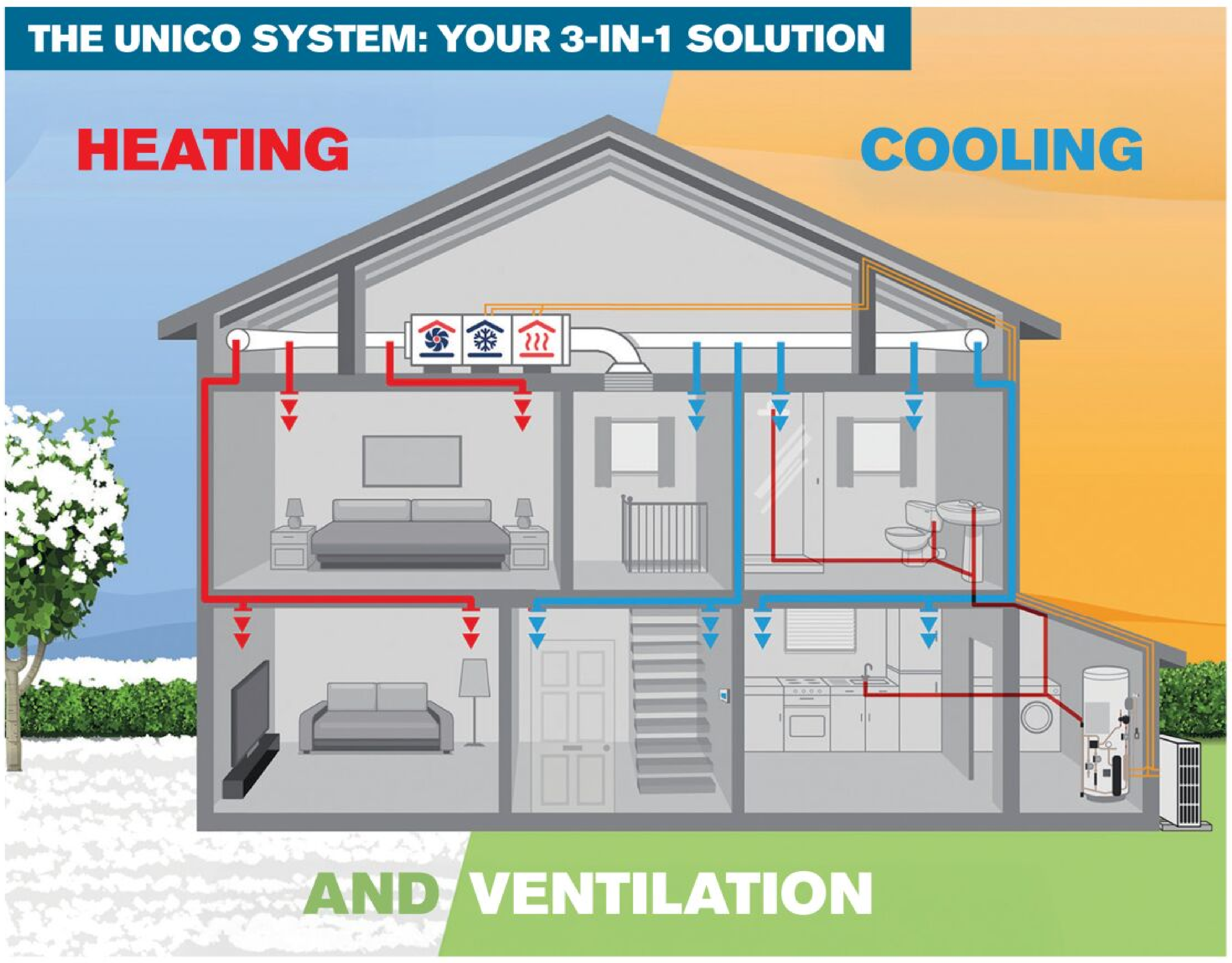
Whether you're self building or upgrading an existing home, one of your key goals will undoubtedly be to create an enjoyable and low-energy living environment, with minimal running costs. A good first step to delivering this is to get the fabric right, by building in good levels of insulation and airtightness. Do be mindful of materials choice in older properties, where it's often best to use breathable products such as mineral wool and lime or clay plasters. A dry and well-insulated structure will perform better, enabling the temperature management systems you install to achieve maximum efficiency.

Thermal comfort, however, isn't just about retaining heat in the building during the colder months. Increasingly in the UK, we also need to think about cooling strategies – and not just in the peak of summer; by April this year, many of us had already experienced overheating in our homes.

Step in HVAC (heating, ventilation and cooling) systems, which can offer a raft of benefits for your project. There's a broad brush of options, but one thing they're all particularly good at is temperature regulation. And if you're imagining the kind of wall-mounted aircon units you might see in a

What is HVAC & how does it contribute to a healthy home?

- HVAC refers to all-in-one systems that deliver heating, ventilation and cooling as a single package. This approach to climate control is already hugely popular in the US but offers real benefits for early adopters in the UK, too.
- The best examples deliver fully integrated control over your home's internal environment and air quality, delivering consistent temperatures and superior comfort levels.
- HVAC systems run quietly, efficiently and without the need for radiators or other wall-mounted equipment. This frees up space and enhances your design options, so you can make your home beautiful to look at and live in.
- Centralised solutions like The Unico System are best in class, delivering ultimate climate control. Unico provides ideal ventilation rates, filters out allergens and toxins, and manages humidity levels to boost indoor air quality.
- You also have the option to integrate HVAC with other systems, such as heat pumps or boilers, for a complete heating and hot water solution.



hotel room, fear not! Modern options like The Unico System are designed to offer precise climate control via discreet wall or ceiling outlets that complement your home's decor and negate the need for space-hogging radiators or fans.

Achieving a comfortable, consistent internal temperature starts with good air distribution – exactly what The Unico System was originally designed to deliver. Radiator-based central heating systems rely on wall-mounted thermostats and radiator valves, which can only sense the temperature in their immediate vicinity – potentially leaving you with hot and cold spots. As a small duct, high-velocity system, Unico does things differently by introducing jets of pre-warmed or pre-cooled air. This encourages room air to mix effectively, providing an even climate throughout your whole house.

Heating and cooling cycles are thus more predictable and efficient, saving you money and ensuring optimum comfort. Maintaining a consistent temperature contributes to good air quality, too, avoiding spikes in humidity that could otherwise promote condensation and mould growth.

What's more, because Unico is a centralised system with smaller supply ducting than other whole-house ventilation options, it's easy to install in both new builds and many retrofit projects. Working in tandem with a suitable heat source, such as a heat pump, Unico will deliver a comfortable and healthy home year-round.

Ventilation & air quality

Did you know there can be up to five times more pollution inside our homes than there is outdoors? The secret to dealing with this issue is to focus on creating good indoor air quality through proper ventilation and filtration – protecting the health of both the occupants and the building.

Part F of the Building Regulations was updated in 2022 in a bid to encourage better ventilation, but it only goes so far. This is your home, where you'll be spending much of your time, so think twice about simply doing the bare minimum. Getting the ventilation strategy right is particularly important if you're building or renovating to tight modern construction standards, or if anyone in your household has conditions such as asthma, allergies or compromised immune systems.

As a central air handling system, Unico is founded on the principle of delivering fantastic indoor air quality, offering advanced filtration, disinfection and controlled ventilation – all in a single package. Plus, its unique cooling coil design means it's able to remove up to 30% more humidity than conventional HVAC solutions, which dramatically reduces the risk of condensation and protects the building fabric, too.

Materials & finishes

Good materials choice is critical for a healthy home. Some construction products are more prone to off-gassing harmful toxins (such as VOCs) than others. Taking care over what you put into your build will therefore help reduce indoor air pollution, while the filtration and climate control functions of your advanced HVAC system take care of the rest of the job. Healthy materials are gaining traction in UK construction, and some designers, suppliers and trades do have experience using and recommending alternatives. But if breathing good air is important to you, it may be time to get your research hat on.

Consider natural insulation products rather than plastics, for instance; wood wool boards as opposed to gypsum plasterboard; natural lime or clay-based paint instead of the standard stuff from DIY sheds; and the latest options such as bio-composite kitchen carcassing rather than chipboard (which contains formaldehyde and other VOCs). Natural and organic products tend to look and feel better to live with, adding texture and warmth to your living spaces.

Controlling noise

Unwelcome noise can quickly become more than just a distraction, so plan for acoustic comfort, too. If you live near a busy street or aircraft route, for example, products such as triple-glazed or acoustic double-glazed windows can help block out external sound. Noise transfer within the home can be more disruptive than outdoor sources – think stompy feet and teenage drummers. Simple upgrades to floor and wall structures, such as installing stone wool insulation and acoustic plasterboard, will go a long way.

Some of the systems you might fit, such as extract fans or traditional wall-mounted aircon, can also be noisy. Quality is king here. For instance, the small-duct, high-velocity Unico System delivers heating, cooling and ventilation in a whisper-quiet package. Sound-absorbing insulation, vibration pads and acoustically attenuated supply ducts are just a few of the features that, when installed by an approved partner, will guarantee quiet operation.

Above: The air handling unit and central duct for The Unico System are typically located in the loft space. Small, high-velocity ducts spur off this to deliver controlled heating and cooling to each room

RICHARD SOPER is UK MD at The Unico System. He has over five decades' experience in the heating industry and was awarded a CBE in 2013 for services to the heating and renewable technologies industries. Alongside international board-level roles, Richard was MD and CEO of Bosch Thermotechnology (including Worcester Bosch). The Unico System provides the perfect home climate control from a small-duct, high-velocity renewable HVAC solution that's efficient and discreet. For advice on your project visit **uk.unicosystem.com/build-it** or call **01384 422094** to speak with the team's technical experts.

Emily Batesmith investigates why this route to a new home could be a great fit for your project goals and shares some inspiring real-life builds

THE CUSTOM BUILD APPROACH

PLANNING PERMISSION SECURED
Getting building consent from the local authority can be a protracted process, so arguably the biggest benefit of the custom build route is that someone has already taken care of securing planning permission. Custom Build Homes worked closely with the local planning officers to secure consent for nine homes at their Callum Park project in Kent **(custombuildhomes.co.uk)**

ENERGY EFFICIENT HOMES

If you're after living environment that's comfortable year-round, with low running costs and minimal carbon emissions, working with a custom build developer is a great option. They will have the knowledge and resources to guarantee you get the result you want. Grove Park in Kent by Quinn Homes is an EPC A rated development, with highly efficient insulation, air source heat pumps and solar technology included **(quinn-homes.com)**

EXPERT INSIGHT

JAMES BUCHANAN
head of custom build at Oakwrights, looks ahead to the future of custom build

Q With different routes to custom build, what is your definition?
I see custom build as a way of delivering the buyer a bespoke home that meets their lifestyle needs, budget and has everything tailored to them. What I've seen a lot recently is companies finding loopholes to exploit custom and self build by offering a house where you get to pick the carpet and kitchen... but that doesn't provide the flexibility of a true custom build. And the government have tried to clamp down on that now by saying that to be true custom and self build, the end plot purchaser has to have significant design input into their home.

Q What steps should the government take to support custom build?
They could help with the finance side of things. A major downfall for us in the business financially is that we can't claim VAT back on any of the infrastructure put into the site for the roads and services etc. Ideally the government will make a process where companies offering true custom build could claim that back, so we wouldn't have to be passing that cost on down the line to the plot buyers.

Q What types of custom build will gain traction in coming years?
I think it's going to be truly bespoke offerings, but with a cohesive feel across the housing site. I've seen some of the larger developers do big large-scale housing and then put a small element of custom build to the side of it, but these properties still look like the mass spec-built homes next door. Whereas I want to see sites push the boundaries, having maybe 20 or 30 houses that are all one-off homes.

Looking ahead, I believe the most popular custom build route people will choose is going to be something between a dry shell and a turnkey service. Life is getting busier and people don't have a lot of spare time. I'd love to see custom build open up to a larger audience and bring the average age demographic of self builders down.

Q What hurdles for custom build would you like to see change?
It would be good for local authorities' understanding of how custom build sites are delivered to be better. At the moment, for instance, we have a development of six houses where it was very clear on the planning application that this is for custom build plots, but the planning conditions attached to it are written in a way that makes custom build difficult. They're telling me I can't discharge a planning condition until I've sorted all my conditions out, but I can't sort my conditions out until I've designed all the houses. The two don't go together! There's a lack of understanding at councils about how custom build sites are delivered in practical terms.

STUNNING COUNTRYSIDE LOCATIONS

If you want to create a new home in a picturesque rural setting, many custom build developments are situated on the edges of villages in idyllic spots. Abode Homes' Forest View development of six plots is positioned on the southern end of the Ashdown Forest in East Sussex – a perfect position for far-reaching views and countryside walks **(abode.homes)**

BESPOKE DESIGNS

Custom build developers don't dictate the look and finish of your home like large-scale house builders do – you'll work alongside the company to get the result you want. There might be some parameters in place, such as regional style and positioning on the plot, but this is the case with the self build route, too. Hugr Homes have partnered with Fleming Homes for their development in the Lake District National Park to deliver bespoke house designs **(hugrhomes.com)**

GENEROUS PLOT SIZES
Many custom build plots are bigger than a standard developer site. The minimum land offered on the Meldrum House Estate Development of 42 new properties in Aberdeenshire by Cairnrowan homes, for instance, is half an acre. Each site is sold as a fully serviced plot and buyers have full control over their new home's size, layout, interior fit-out and specification **(cairnrowancustomhomes.com)**

HIGH-SPEC RESULTS
The custom build approach allows you to have full say over the products and finishes inside your new home. Each of the nine new properties at Ascot Homes' D'Urton Rise project in Lancashire features customisable interior layouts, kitchens, bathrooms, tiles, internal doors and joinery **(ascot-homes.co.uk)**

CHOOSE HOW HANDS-ON YOU WANT TO BE

Custom build offers options in terms of how involved you are in the project. You can get fully hands-on with the design and build if you'd like to, or you can choose a turnkey route where the company manages everything on your behalf, handing you the keys when it's ready. Shown here is Langton Gardens by Clarendon Homes – a development of 12 custom build properties in Kent **(clarendonhomes.co.uk)**

EXPERT INSIGHT

JOE HIGGINSON
director of Hugr Homes, shares why the lines are blurred when defining custom build

Q How is custom build different to self build?

At Hugr Homes, our version of custom build is to take plot buyers through every step of the process, from selling the site to them and leading them through the design guide, all the way through specifying the materials, costing it and then delivering their new house. If you were going down a DIY self build route, you'd need to arrange those yourself.

Some custom build companies have services in-house. We work alongside a network of providers, such as mortgage providers, insurance brokers, energy specialists etc, that we can recommend, but these bolt-on services aren't an essential part of the deal. We provide a wraparound service to help and resource the person that wants to design and specify their own house; we try to take the fear factor away from people who think that building their own house is hard.

Q How does the design process work?

It depends on the planning situation. For example, for one of the sites that we have in the Lake District, as long as you work within the design guide then you have planning permission for your house, meaning you don't have to go back in for planning. On other sites, you might need to revisit the planning process for reserved matters. We'll work with you to guide around any planning constraints or permissions. When the design and specification is agreed we'll then give you a fixed price contract for the build and we work with you through the whole delivery of the house.

Q Does every custom build project start with a serviced plot?

We offer serviced, ready-to-go plots. But if people come across sites for two or three homes (that they would ordinarily dismiss because they only want one plot) we offer a service where we can find other plot buyers and take on the planning permissions and delivery of all the infrastructure needed. With that, what we're doing is bringing groups of custom builders together.

MARK WATTS

SPECIALISTS WHO'VE DONE IT ALL BEFORE

Building your own property can be a big learning experience with hurdles to overcome throughout the process. So knowing you're working with a specialist company that has experience in successfully creating bespoke custom build homes will take a large chunk of the stress out of your project. The team at Oakwrights have completed numerous custom build projects, including the Build It Award-winning Webbs Meadow. Shown here is a property at Church View – a nine-plot development in Herefordshire **(oakwrights.co.uk)**

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PHOTOS: CHRIS TAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Above left: A stylish modern kitchen extension has completely transformed this 16th century home in Suffolk

Above right: This contemporary extension features theEDGE2.0 sliding doors from IDSystems across the entire elevation, delivering a stunning connection between inside and out

What to look for in a quality sliding door

IDSystems' Edward Stobart shares the inside track on how to identify the best systems

Over the past decade, the popularity of sliding doors has grown rapidly. Slender framed systems have become the go-to option for many people undertaking a self build or renovation project, surging ahead of bifolds. Offering large glazed panels and minimal framing to interrupt the view out, sliders look great when closed – which glazed doors tend to be, more often than not, given the British climate. This has been a key factor in their meteoric rise.

As this style of door has grown more popular, so system choice has increased. This can make it harder to gauge quality and make the best choice for your home. To help make that process easier, here are some key features to look for.

Slim sightlines done properly

Sightlines are the visible elements of frame between the glass. For sliding doors, they can be as slim as 20mm, meaning a span of up to 9m could be broken up by just 4cm of frame.

When it comes to identifying a high-quality sliding door frame with good sightlines, depth matters just as much as width. There's no point opting for a really narrow frame if the door then requires a chunky reinforcing profile or fin on the leading edge. Not only does this spoil the aesthetic of the door, it also means the frame is anything but narrow when viewed from an angle.

Instead, look for a system where the frame finishes flush to the glass. This means it will look slim from any aspect, not just from face on.

Good choice of configuration options

Whatever the width and height of the aperture, getting the right configuration of door panels is crucial to create the best possible look and make the most of the opening.

Many sliding door systems have limitations on how many panels can slide behind a fixed frame, which reduces your options. So, look for a sliding door system that has a wide range of configuration options to best suit your project, rather than to meet manufacturing limitations.

Three panels sliding behind a fourth fixed frame is great for creating a three-quarter wide opening, for instance. Or for real wow factor, opting for a pocket door setup where the panels slide into the wall will always turn heads.

Glazing method

Can a sliding door system really be classed as a premium product (regardless of how much it costs or how well engineered it is) if you would need to replace an entire door panel should a sealed unit accidentally break in years to come?

This is the risk homeowners face with fully bonded sliding doors, where the sealed glazed unit is permanently glued to all four sides of the frame to achieve the required rigidity. Whilst your home insurance policy probably covers replacing the glass, it's unlikely to stretch to changing the entire panel or the labour required to remove it from the outer frame once plaster and finished floors are installed.

High-performance running gear

This is hard to judge just by looking at the door (ask to see the hardware itself) but the quality of the running carriages the doors slide on can make a massive difference to how easy they are to open and close.

For a premium quality system, you should definitely be looking at stainless steel running gear. Over time, nylon wheels risk buckling or bending under the weight of large glazed panels. High-performance quad-wheel stainless steel carriages offer the ultimate in effortless sliding.

EDWARD STOBART is technical sales manager at IDSystems, which is a multiple Build It award-winning glazing specialist. The company has over 25 years' experience delivering wow-factor glazing for self builds, home extensions and renovations. Edward works closely with self builders to offer advice and support on all aspects of glazing. For more information visit **www.idsystems.co.uk** or speak with one of IDSystems' technical sales team on **01603 408804**.

NAVIGATING VAT RECLAIMS

Unsure if you are following the HMRC process for new builds and conversions correctly? Find out how you can avoid making costly mistakes

DOUGLAS GIBB

Above & right: Set in the heart of Edinburgh, Andrew Laing and June Russell created a mews-style home for £840,000. They self-managed the construction works and were able to reclaim £62,000 in VAT

If you want to build your dream home from scratch, or convert an existing building into a new residence, your project will be eligible for a reduced rate of VAT on the materials and labour that go into it. Although your contractor might be VAT registered – meaning you pay either zero or 5% VAT up front – you will still have to pay any tax on materials you buy yourself. But you can reclaim this money back once your project is completed. HMRC has strict guidelines on what is and isn't eligible and the type of documents they accept – but if you keep on top of your invoices, the process should be straightforward. Here we will explore what projects are acceptable, how to reclaim VAT and common errors to avoid.

What works are eligible for a self build?

To meet the criteria for a self build VAT reclaim, under the VAT431NB scheme, your project must be a new house that you're going to live in yourself. "A new dwelling on a plot of land, a replacement dwelling where the original has been fully demolished and completing a building shell, which was purchased from a developer/builder, are all valid forms of construction that you can claim VAT back on," says Wayne Turner from Claim It Back VAT Refunds (www.vatclaim.co.uk). "Extensions, annexes, caravans or properties built outside the UK won't be eligible, as they do not meet HMRC's definition of a new dwelling." You also aren't allowed to claim any money back if you intend on using the property as a business, rental or to sell it on.

How much can you claim back on a self build?

As mentioned, if you buy any materials yourself, you can claim back the 20% VAT. If you use a VAT registered builder, there will be no VAT to pay anyway. Turnkey design and build projects are also zero rated, so make sure your package invoice clearly shows this VAT status.

"Undoubtedly the best way to maximise the reclaim process is to purchase everything yourself," says Wayne. By taking this route, you have a clear record of what you are owed and can easily claim back the correct amount.

Common mistakes

When creating your claim, there are a couple of pitfalls many people tend to fall into. One typical error is submitting invoices or planning documents that aren't in your name. "Even the name of your business will not be valid, and make sure that all payments come from your personal account and go directly to the supplier – otherwise, they won't be accepted by HMRC," says Andrew Jones, managing director at Andrew Jones the VATman (www.vat431.co.uk).

And don't think you can squeeze a scheme through if it doesn't meet the criteria. "HMRC will search for your property online to see if it is up for sale or available to rent – if so, your claim will be invalid," says Andrew. Alongside this, HMRC will do a thorough check to make sure there aren't any conditions within the planning permission that could mean your property isn't an independent dwelling – for instance, if it's classed as an annexe or doesn't have its own council tax banding, separate address or utility bills.

Remember, it's your responsibility to confirm the correct VAT rate for your project and check that contractor invoices reflect this. If a builder incorrectly charges VAT and your pay it, HMRC won't refund you. When in doubt, consult a VAT specialist or your project designer.

JONATHAN WIGMORE

VAT reclaims for conversions

So far, we have been focusing on self build projects, but what about conversions of barns, offices and the like into residential use? If you are converting an existing structure into your new home, there are some important differences to new constructions when it comes to reclaiming VAT.

"The building must not have any planning restrictions with regards to its disposal (sale) or in relation to its use in connection with another property. Again, it may not be used as a business, sold, rented or leased," says Andrew.

The non-residential building that you are altering must either have never been used for residential purposes or not have been used in that way in the 10 years before the work begins. This means you cannot live in the property at any time before you start any construction work, otherwise you will reset the counter and your claim won't be valid. "There is a policy for properties that have been empty for two or more years, but this is different to the DIY Housebuilder scheme and is something you will have to discuss with your contractor," says Wayne.

It's important to note that rates for conversions are also slightly different from new build homes. "With conversions, you should pay 20% VAT for any materials that you have purchased from suppliers in person and online, and a reduced rate of 5% VAT to builders," says Wayne.

Any valid invoices from VAT-registered contractors and trades, be that for labour-only or labour and materials, should therefore use the reduced 5% rate, while you'll pay 20% on products you buy yourself. You can then use the VAT431C scheme to reclaim the VAT you've been charged – and yes, that includes the reduced-rate 5% tax.

Making your VAT reclaim

"The rules changed in December 2023, so you now have six months from the date of your completion certificate to submit your claim," says Andrew. There are three possible ways to make an application: either online; in the post or through an agent who will complete all the relevant information on your behalf, using your documents.

Be aware that you will have to fill out different forms for new builds (VAT Notice 431NB) as opposed to conversions (VAT Notice 431C), so be sure to pick the correct one. Alongside all your invoices, you will need to collate any professional plans, planning permission and evidence that shows the work is completed.

It's important to take a tidy, methodical and thorough approach to record keeping. Make sure to retain any original documents you receive and try not to scribble any of your own notes on them. You don't want messy, unorganised filing getting in the way of claiming your money back.

Above: Self builders Jan Burroughs & Kate Sutherland's low-energy timber frame home in Cornwall cost £572,000 to build. They were able to reclaim £24,000 of VAT, as they purchased the materials themselves

WHAT CAN'T YOU CLAIM FOR?

The rules are designed to help you access a VAT refund on goods and labour that are fixed into the building. In general, the following are not eligible:

✘ **Professional fees** from your architect, surveyors, building control and planning etc.

✘ **Hire charges,** such as for scaffolding

✘ **Tools & machinery**

✘ **Kitchen appliances** (cooker hoods, however, are eligible)

✘ **Intercoms/doorbells & CCTV systems**

✘ **Carpets**

✘ **Furniture** (although you can claim for fitted kitchen cabinets)

✘ **The plot** (but you can claim for soft landscaping, such as turf)

If you are unsure about eligibility, it is always a good idea to double check, as you will only get one chance to submit your reclaim to HMRC.

CHRIS WHARTON PHOTOGRAPHY

Designed by BetterPAD Architects (www.betterpad.co.uk), this full-house renovation in South London, involved a side return extension and loft conversion, opening the house up to the garden and maximising daylight throughout. The loft space – which now holds two bedrooms and a bathroom – is clad in zinc and features large picture windows to capture the far-reaching city views

DURING

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO LOFT CONVERSIONS

Looking to create additional rooms without eating into precious garden space? A loft conversion could be your best bet, says **Kate Sandhu**. Here are the key factors to consider for a successful project from start to finish

Converting a loft is one of the smartest ways to unlock unused space in your home and create something truly transformative. It's also one of the simplest and least disruptive options, as it's often a self-contained project that comes with low complexity and low risk. Whether it's a new bedroom, a work from home office, or even a luxurious master suite, a well-designed loft conversion will not only enhance your lifestyle, but can boost your home's value by around 20%.

So, how do you go from dusty storage to stylish living space? This guide takes you through the key stages of the loft conversion process – from feasibility and design, through to the build, costs and practical considerations.

1 Is your loft suitable for conversion?

The most important factor is head height: you'll ideally need at least 2.2m from the floor joists to the ridge of the roof. If the space is tight, structural alterations might be required to raise the roof, which will add time and cost.

The structure of your roof also matters. Traditional cut timber roofs are typically easier to convert than modern trussed roofs, which often require additional engineering to create usable space. It's also vital to think about where a staircase could fit without eating into the property's existing rooms or circulation space on lower floors.

Another practical consideration is whether you can live in your home while the work is carried out. Many people do, especially with simpler conversions, but there will be noise, dust and some disruption, particularly when the staircase up to the loft area is installed.

2 Getting the design right

Designing your loft space is more than just picking paint colours. The layout, light, storage and even the views should all play into your design and project plans. Many people start by hiring an architect, particularly if they want a bespoke layout or their property poses structural or planning challenges. Others may opt for a design and build firm that handles both the planning and construction in one package. Specialist loft conversion companies also offer a more streamlined route and are typically well-versed in local planning requirements.

Arguably, if it is a simple loft conversion, you may not even need an architect. You can find approved designs on your local planning portal for inspiration and then use an architectural designer or even a draughtsperson to draw it up for you – this is a great option for those who already know what they want. You'll miss out on any fresh ideas a designer may bring, but you will save money.

There is no right or wrong choice. Your chosen route will depend largely on how involved you want to be, your scheme's complexity and budget. Arguably, the simpler it is, the less need for an end-to-end approach.

3 Planning permission & Building Regs

Most loft conversions fall under permitted development (PD) rights, meaning they do not require a full planning application – so long as the project meets certain criteria. For example, materials should complement the existing structure, and dormers should not extend beyond the principal elevation if facing a highway. That said, it can be tricky to navigate the various rules and many people choose to go through planning anyway for peace of mind.

Homes in conservation areas, listed buildings, or loft projects that significantly alter the roof shape, will likely require full planning permission. Scope of development varies depending on the area and local planning authority. If you aren't sure whether you will get permission for your project, you can always look for precedent on your street or in your local area, or check the planning portal website.

Even if planning isn't required, your project will always need to comply with Building Regulations, which cover everything from structural integrity to fire safety, thermal performance and staircase design.

4 Structural considerations

The existing floor will almost certainly need to be reinforced, and the roof may need structural elements repositioned or upgraded. The placement of the staircase – ideally stacked above existing stairs for ease of access and good flow – is a key decision and should be factored into the design early on to ensure it meets the regs.

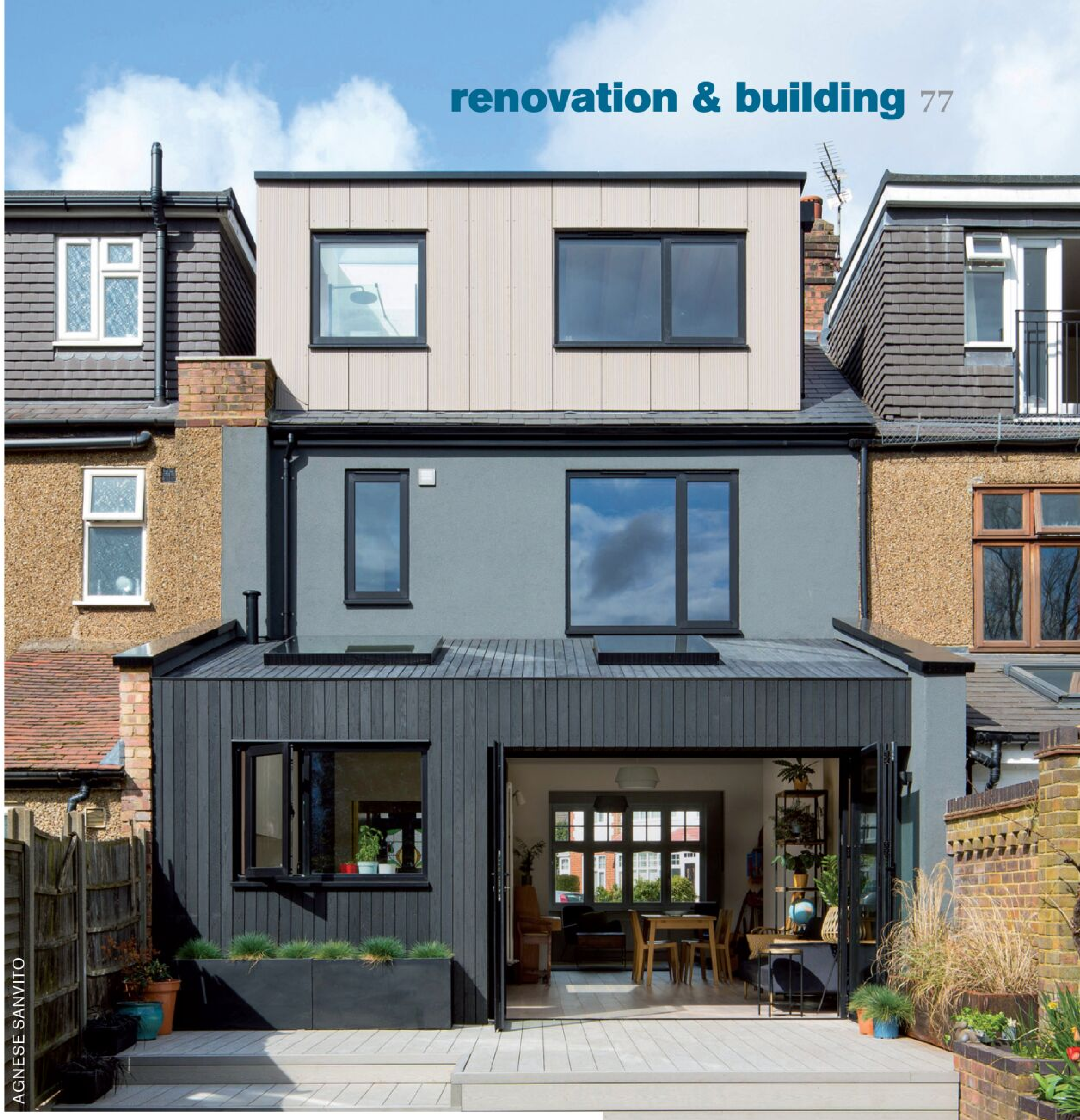
Fire safety is another major concern. This may include upgrading doors to fire-rated specifications, installing smoke alarms on each floor, and ensuring there's a protected escape route. Insulation also plays a vital role. Most modern loft conversions use warm roof insulation, ideally installed above and between rafters to maximise ceiling height while ensuring good energy efficiency.

5 Finding the right builder

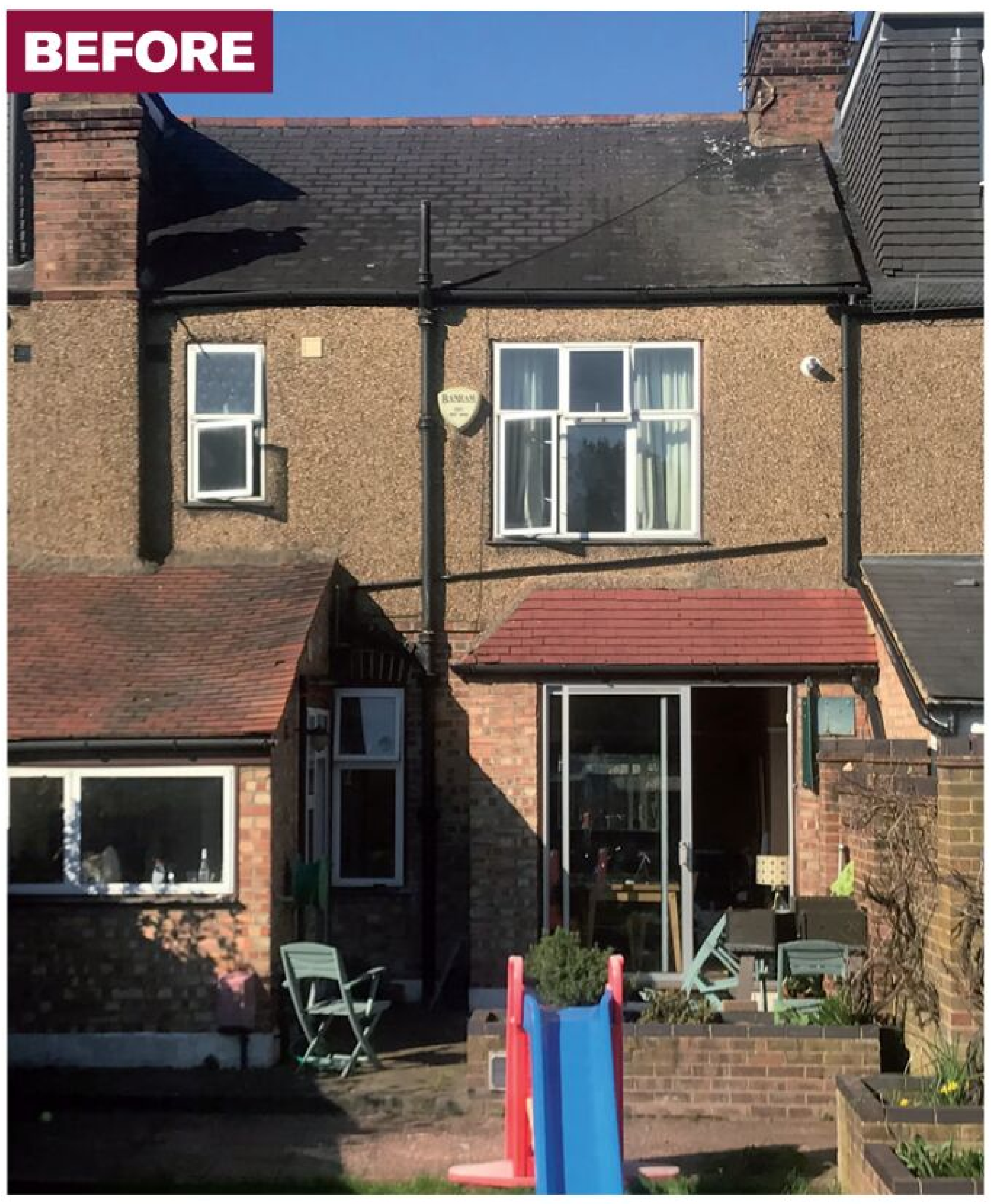
Unless you've enlisted the skills of a design and build firm, who are taking your project from concept to completion, you'll need to find a contractor with proven experience in loft conversions. Aim to find someone with good, solid references, appropriate insurance, and ideally, membership in accredited trade bodies such as the Federation of Master Builders (FMB).

Always look for recommendations, whether they're from people you know, neighbours, local forums, or the internet. As well as a recommendation, aim to visit previous projects they have completed and meet the owners to understand how happy they are with the job.

Don't forget, cheapest isn't always best; it's important to get a detailed, broken-down quote so that you can compare builders like-for-like, as well as being able to understand any potential increase in costs should they arise. They should also supply you with a clear project



AGNESE SANVITO



Nicky and Gemma Kirk's 1930s property had great proportions and potential to extend at the rear and convert the loft – theirs was the only house on the road without a dormer. The newly-converted attic space benefits from a master suite and bathroom, topped by an entire roof of glass. The interior features plenty of exposed timber and contemporary built-in storage to maximise the room's floorspace

TOP TIPS MAXIMISING POTENTIAL

Transforming your loft into a bright, functional space takes more than just building work – it's all about clever design. Here are some top tips to help you maximise every inch and make your new room feel spacious, stylish, and practical.

- **Make the most of eaves storage with smart, integrated units.**
- **Use rooflights or dormers to flood the space with natural light.**
- **Choose lighter finishes and open-plan layouts to make the room feel bigger.**
- **Think vertically – higher ceilings can add drama, especially with exposed beams.**
- **Invest in multifunctional furniture, especially in compact spaces.**

PLANNING A PROJECT SCHEDULE

A loft conversion is one of the most effective ways to add space and value to your home – but knowing what to expect can make the process far smoother. Below is a typical 10 to 12-week timeline that outlines how a standard conversion might progress from assessing potential through to final sign-off.

WEEKS 1–2 begin with feasibility checks, like measuring head height, assessing the structure and access. Designers start early layouts and technical surveys may be scheduled. Now is also the time to approach contractors for estimates.

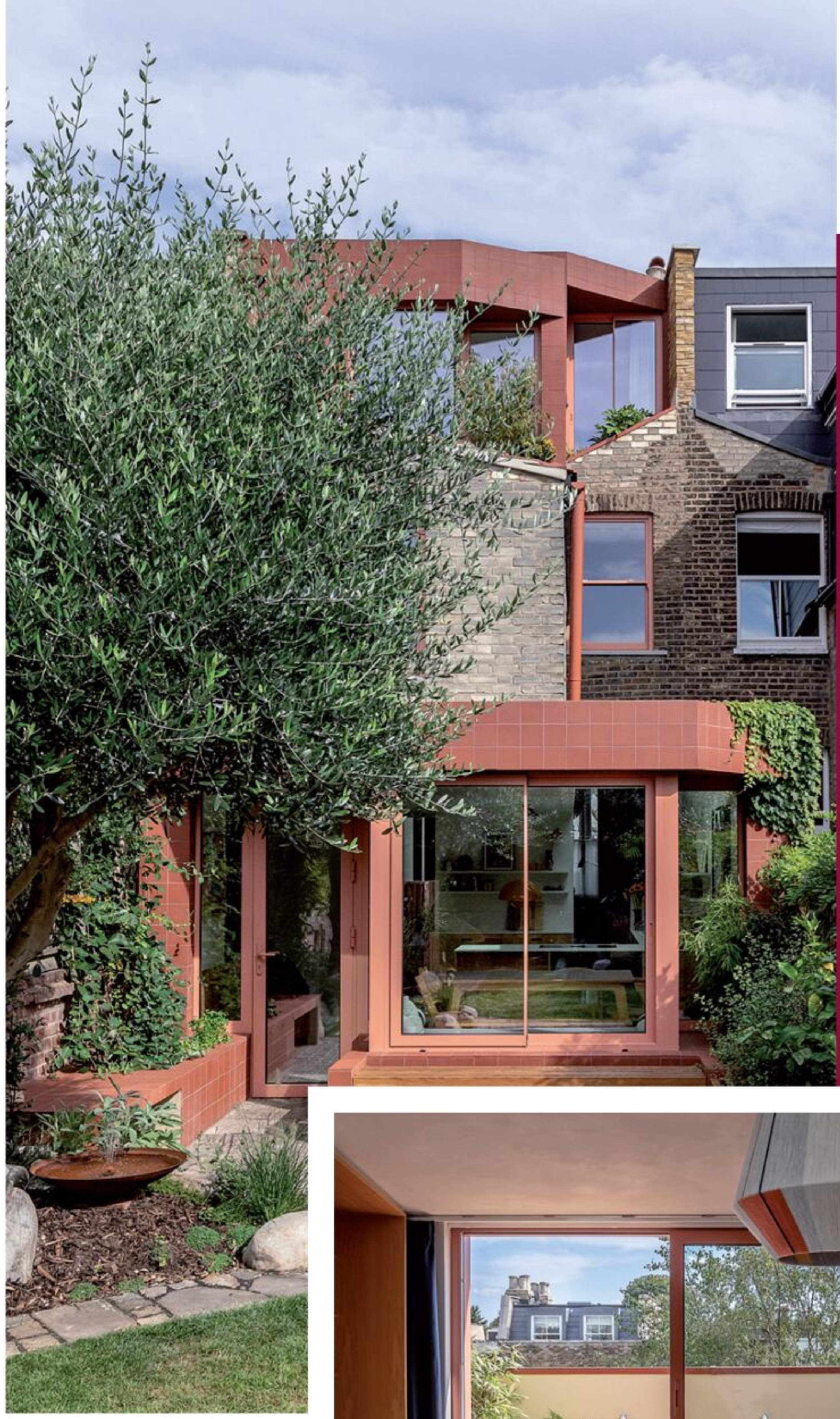
WEEKS 3–4 cover planning and structural design. If under permitted development, you may not need full planning, but a certificate of lawful development is often advisable. A structural engineer can work on floor reinforcement, steel placements and staircase plans. You'll also confirm window sizes and draft a build programme/schedule.

WEEKS 5–6 mark the start of construction. The loft floor is reinforced, and any required steel beams or dormer frames are installed. Builders often work from scaffolding to reduce any disruption to the existing house.

WEEKS 7–8 focus on roofing, insulation, and first-fix electrics and plumbing. Rooflights are fitted and services are installed, such as plug sockets.

WEEKS 9–10 bring the internal fit-out phase, which involves plasterboarding, joinery and finalising the staircase – transforming the loft space into a real room.

WEEKS 11–12 are for the finishing touches: painting, flooring, fixtures and snagging. Building control signs off the project and you receive your completion certificate.



TARAN WILKHU

A contemporary rear extension and loft conversion by Emil Eve Architects (www.emileve.co.uk) has transformed this London home. The design boasts a terracotta tile-clad exterior, making a bold statement set against the original house's brick facade. The loft conversion and roof extension add a full storey, creating a new ensuite bedroom

timeline, written contract and have regular communication with you during the process.

6 How much does a loft conversion cost?

The cost of a loft conversion can vary widely depending on the type of project and the level of finish you're after, as well as geographical location (with southern areas being more expensive than northern).

- **A rooflight conversion** will not require any major structural work, and will typically only involve installing rooflights and internal renovations (such as reinforcing the floor). You'll need to ensure you have enough head height inside the existing loft and consider the location of the staircase. You may need to place your new flight in the centre of the plan due to headroom restrictions. This type of conversion can start at around **£25,000**.
- **Dormer conversions** will involve adding a box-like structure to the sloping roof section, creating additional headroom, floorspace and window openings. These are the most common type of project and typically cost between **£35,000-£50,000**.
- **Mansard conversions** involve raising one wall and altering the roof slope, typically at the rear, to create a nearly-flat roof section with a steep back wall. This will maximise internal space and effectively add a new storey. This kind of project involves significant changes to the roof and can cost upwards of **£60,000**.
- **Hip-to-gable conversions** will extend the sloping (hipped) side of a roof to form a vertical gable wall, significantly increasing height and floor area. Expect to pay above **£60,000** for this type of loft conversion.

In addition to the core build costs, you'll need to account for several other expenses. These involve strengthening floor joists to meet Building Regulations, adding insulation at rafter level, adding electrics and plumbing as required, and installing stairs and windows. The interior fit-out – such as plastering, flooring and lighting – also needs to be factored in to your overall spend. It's wise to allocate around 10–15% to a contingency fund to account for any unexpected costs along the way and ensure you are covered in case of any unforeseen issues.

7 Common pitfalls (and how to avoid them)

Loft conversions can be incredibly rewarding, but they're not without challenges. Poor planning and preparation can lead to awkward layouts, wasted space or regulatory headaches. Hidden structural issues, underestimating costs, or hiring the wrong contractor are all risks that can derail your project. To stay on track, engage the experts early on, plan thoroughly and ensure every stage – from design through to construction – is signed off by qualified professionals. You should consider the long-term, too. A well-thought-out loft should not only meet your needs today but remain useful as your household evolves.

KATE SANDHU

Kate Sandhu is a renovation pro, helping others to understand the process and save as much money as possible via her home renovation course. She shares a wealth of knowledge, as well as DIY tips via her blog renovatelikekate.com and Instagram account @renovatelikekate

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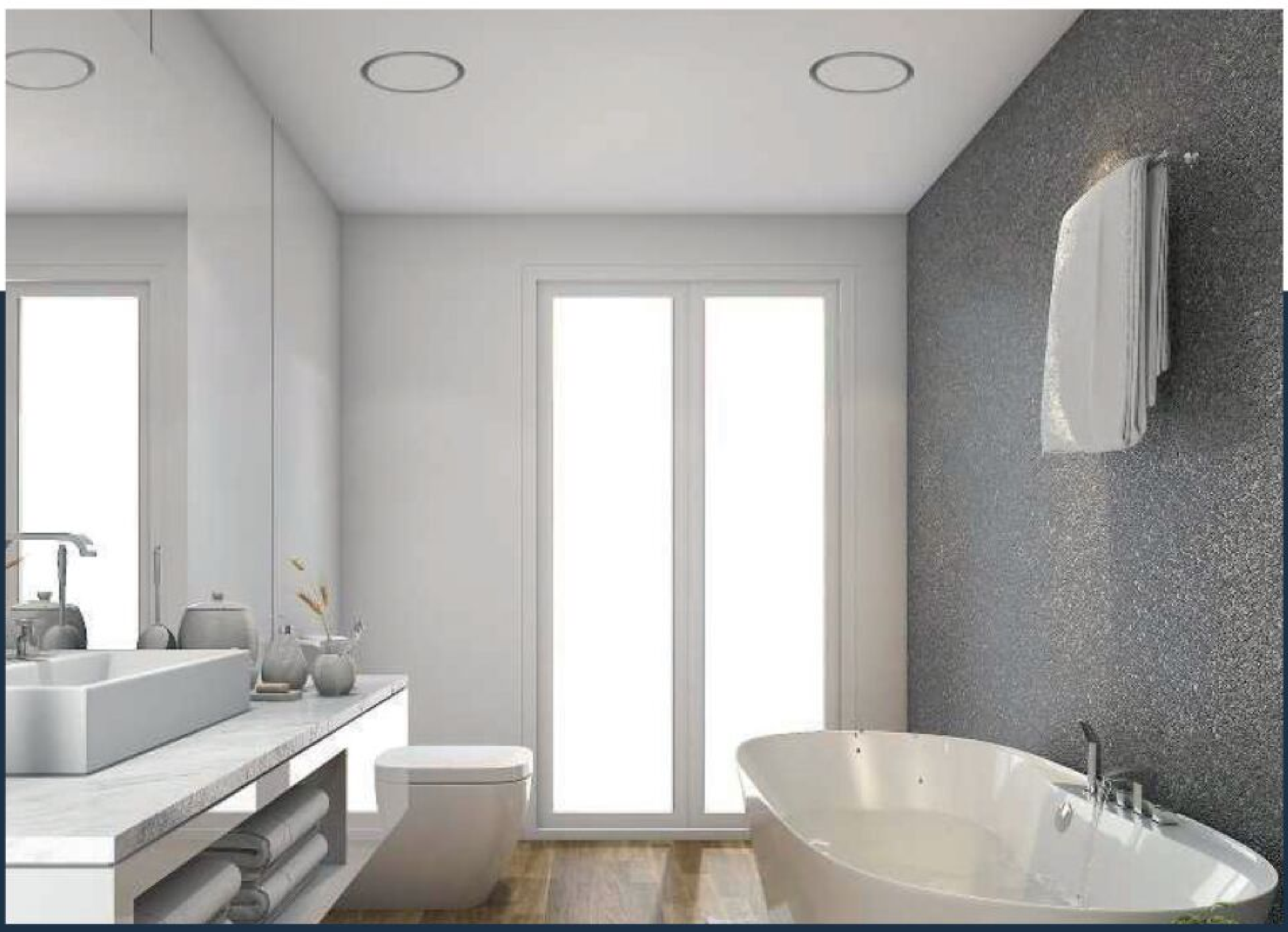

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RETROFITTING MVHR

Discover the best strategies for installing a mechanical ventilation & heat recovery system as part of your renovation project

Above: Rise Design Studio crafted the design of the renovation and extension of this house in North London. As part of the project, the thermal envelope of the house was upgraded to establish a well-insulated, airtight shell. MVHR provides fresh filtered air throughout the property, while also retaining the heat that has already been used to warm the interiors

Good ventilation is a critical factor for creating a healthy internal living environment, as poor air quality can lead to numerous issues including condensation, damp and the accumulation of unpleasant smells, allergens and contaminants.

The removal of stale air and its replacement with a fresh supply can be achieved by various means. One option is to install a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery (MVHR) system, which recaptures outgoing heat from your home to offer savings on energy bills, while also offering improved indoor air quality. So, there's good reason to consider including MVHR as part of wider works to improve your property's thermal efficiency.

MVHR basics

First, let's break down how MVHR works. This system removes stale air from your home and introduces a fresh supply. Simultaneously, it extracts and recycles heat from the outgoing stream and transfers the warmth to the incoming flow, potentially reducing your reliance on boilers, heat pumps etc to deliver heat through underfloor heating (UFH) or radiators. To get the best out of MVHR, it should be installed in a well-insulated, airtight home where warmth isn't going to leak out via the building fabric. Many existing houses won't meet those criteria – so, you'll almost certainly need to make upgrades to thermal performance as part of your project.

EDMUND SUMNER

Usually installed in a plant room, basement or loft, the air-handling unit forms the central hub of the system. It is linked to a series of ducts that are attached to extraction and supply points throughout the house. Stale air is drawn out of each room at the extraction point, channelled to the main unit's heat exchanger and expelled outside. The extracted warmth is transferred into fresh air, which is then ducted to individual rooms. Filters within the main unit work to remove pollutants from the supply.

As ducting runs are typically installed within the fabric of the building, finding space for them in a retrofit scenario can be challenging – but it's by no means impossible. Here, we debunk the myth that you can't install MVHR in an existing home, as well as exploring the solutions for making your installation easier.

Why install MVHR?

If you're improving an existing property's thermal performance, you can increase the risk of locking in moisture, leading to condensation and mould growth. "When upgrading insulation or replacing windows, ventilation to the property can take a big hit," says Robert Hamilton, managing director at Rega Vent. "Fitting MVHR will help provide ventilation, assisting in the reduction of mould and providing the benefits of heat recovery, helping to reduce heating costs."

For most existing properties, trickle vents, airbricks and natural solutions (opening windows and relying on leaky building fabrics) take the load when it comes to removing stale air and bringing in a fresh supply. If the kitchens or bathrooms have been updated in recent memory, they'll probably have extractor fans, too. "However, even if trickle vents are kept open – and homeowners often shut them because they let cold air in during winter – they won't work well when there isn't a suitable difference in air temperature/pressure between inside and out, as there won't be any air movement," says Clarissa Youden, associate director at Total Home Environment. "Even with extractor fans pulling air from the wet rooms, they aren't on for long enough to provide adequate ventilation for the whole house."

Positive input ventilation (PIV) systems are often considered to be the go-to solution for renovation scenarios because they're straightforward to install. A fan-powered unit is installed, usually in the loft, which draws in fresh air from outside. The incoming flow is propelled through the house via a network of ducts. As the fresh air is drawn in, the pressure increases and stale air is pushed out through gaps in the fabric of the building – so it's well-suited to less efficient homes. If you're making substantial upgrades to the thermal envelope, though, PIV may not be a good fit.

What a PIV system can't do is provide dedicated control over air quality. "PIV doesn't create a specific ventilation path. For example, an occupied bedroom with the door closed might benefit next to nothing from PIV," says Stefan Huber, managing director at Paul Heat Recovery. "Another drawback is that cold air is pumped into your home in the colder seasons, while in summer, scorching hot air is all a PIV system can introduce. MVHR systems, on the other hand, can really control internal air quality."

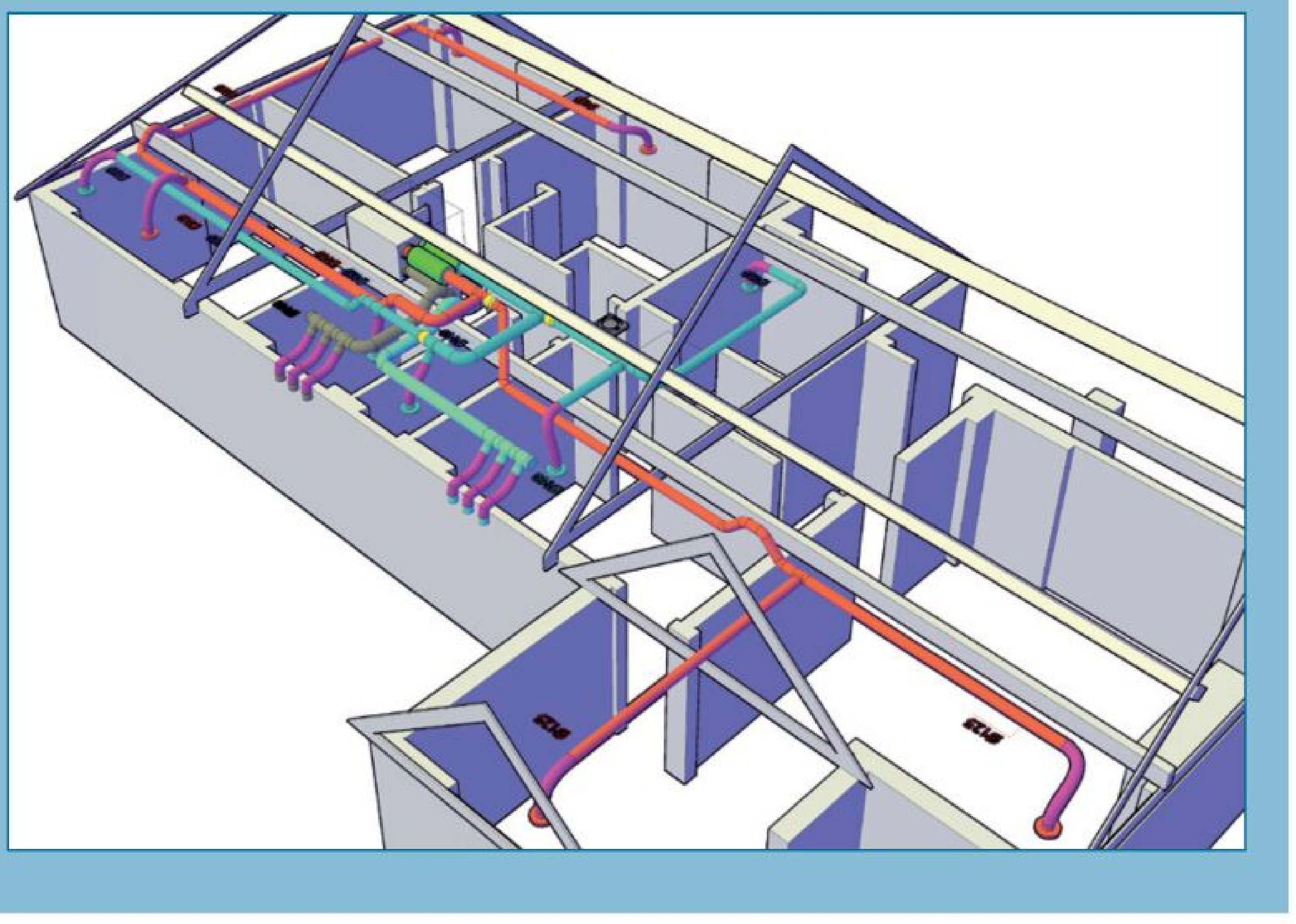
CASE STUDY

INSTALLING MVHR IN AN OXFORDSHIRE BUNGALOW

Total Home Environment took the lead in planning the design and installation of the MVHR system in this detached Cotswold stone bungalow. Keen to modernise the property – particularly the kitchens and the bathrooms – the owners decided to install MVHR to prevent mould and mildew growth that was caused by inadequate ventilation.

Prior to their project, high humidity levels had resulted in mould growth on the walls, condensation pooling on window cills and black marks appearing on the wallpaper. The humidity levels also made the property difficult to sleep in on warm summer nights.

Total Home Environment supplied and fitted a Genvex heat recovery system to combat these issues. As the property is set over a single storey, installation was a fairly simple process. "All the work was done in the loft," says Clarissa Youden, associate director at Total Home Environment. "It was a cold roof space, meaning all the metal ductwork – apart from the exhaust duct – had to be insulated." The air-handling unit was installed above the bathroom in the loft, away from the bedroom to minimise sound. The installation took just two days for a three-person team to complete.

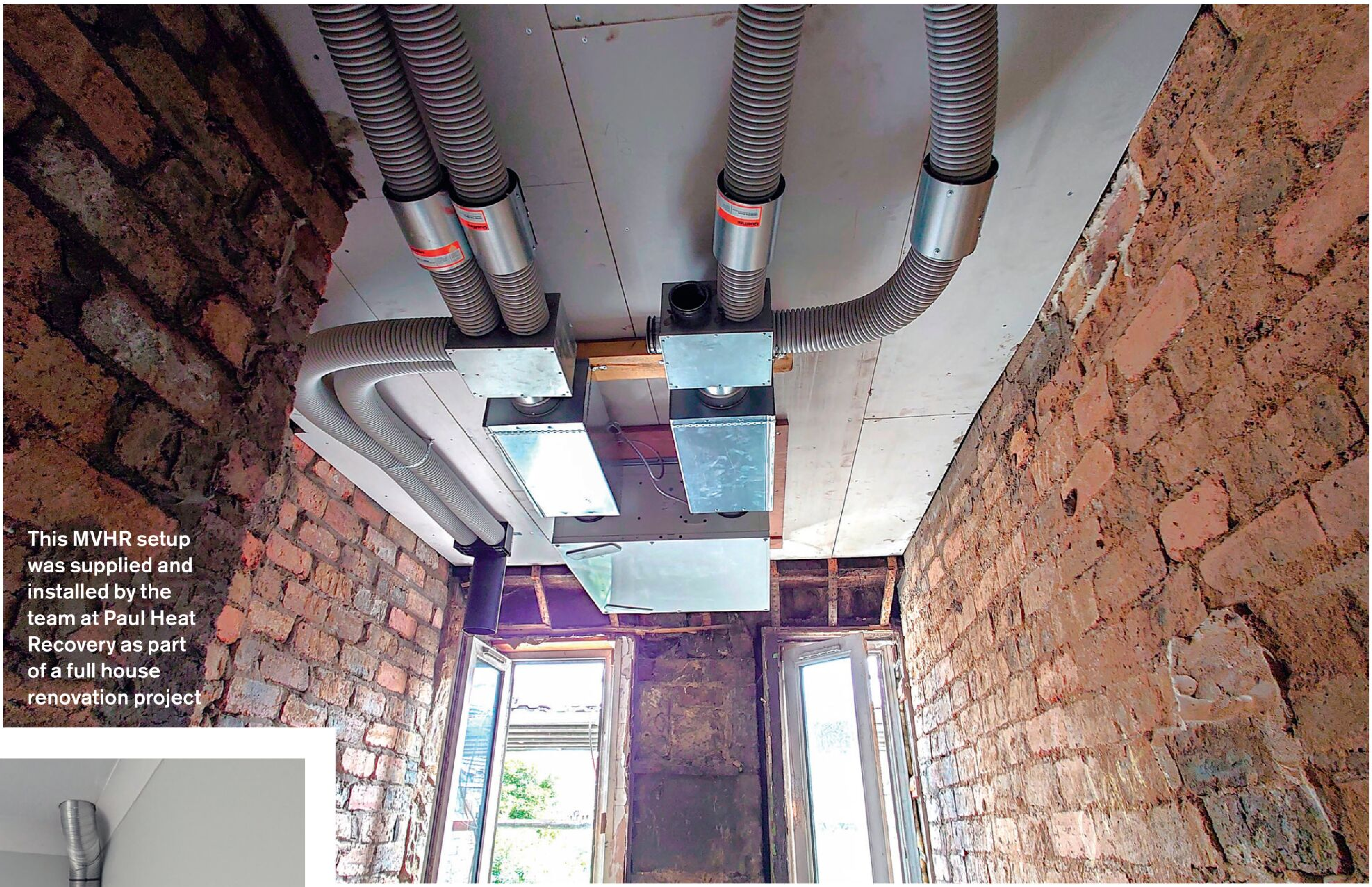


Options for retrofitting MVHR

Many people think it's not possible to retrofit MVHR unless you completely gut a property. "Fitting the ductwork into an existing home can be difficult due to the size of the pipes, but there are a range of different options available," says Robert. Where space is at a premium, ducting can be hidden in bulkheads or false ceiling voids, for instance. Rigid spiral wound steel ducting generally performs best – and can be left exposed if you want to introduce an industrial aesthetic to your home's interiors. However, in retrofit projects where space is tight, semi-rigid solutions that offer more flexibility can make it easier to fit the system.

The ideal location for an MVHR unit would be in a utility or plant room close to an external wall. However, in retrofit scenarios sometimes the only space for the air-handling unit is in the loft. "The good thing about the unit being in the attic is that you can hide a lot of the ducting up there, certainly the ducts going to upstairs terminals," says Clarissa. Installation therefore tends to be fairly simple in bungalows, as the unit and all the pipes can be hidden in the attic, providing you have good access to the space for maintenance.

Ducting can be laid beneath the loft insulation, with external terminals ideally installed in the property's gable end wall. "For two-storey homes, you then just need to T-off and find drops to get down into the floors below – at the back of a fitted wardrobe, airing cupboard,



This MVHR setup was supplied and installed by the team at Paul Heat Recovery as part of a full house renovation project

behind the bath or by adding some extra boxing-in next to existing boxing are all good options," says Clarissa.

If installing the runs of ductwork is tricky in a two-storey property, an alternative strategy could be to use a hybrid approach, such as MVHR on the upper storey and natural solutions on the ground floor. Another option is a cascade ventilation system, where the MVHR design focuses primarily on ducting to the bathroom and/or kitchen. "This often works alongside cascade fans that distribute fresh air to the habitable rooms without ducting," says Stefan. "It can be easier to install in certain buildings, but requires a sizeable hole through an external wall."

Where structural issues are prohibitive to installing a whole-house system, decentralised MVHR could be employed (possibly in conjunction with a centralised unit for part of the house). If you're interested in dMVHR, sometimes known as single-room heat recovery, be sure to look for high-quality products that offer proven efficiency and low noise output.

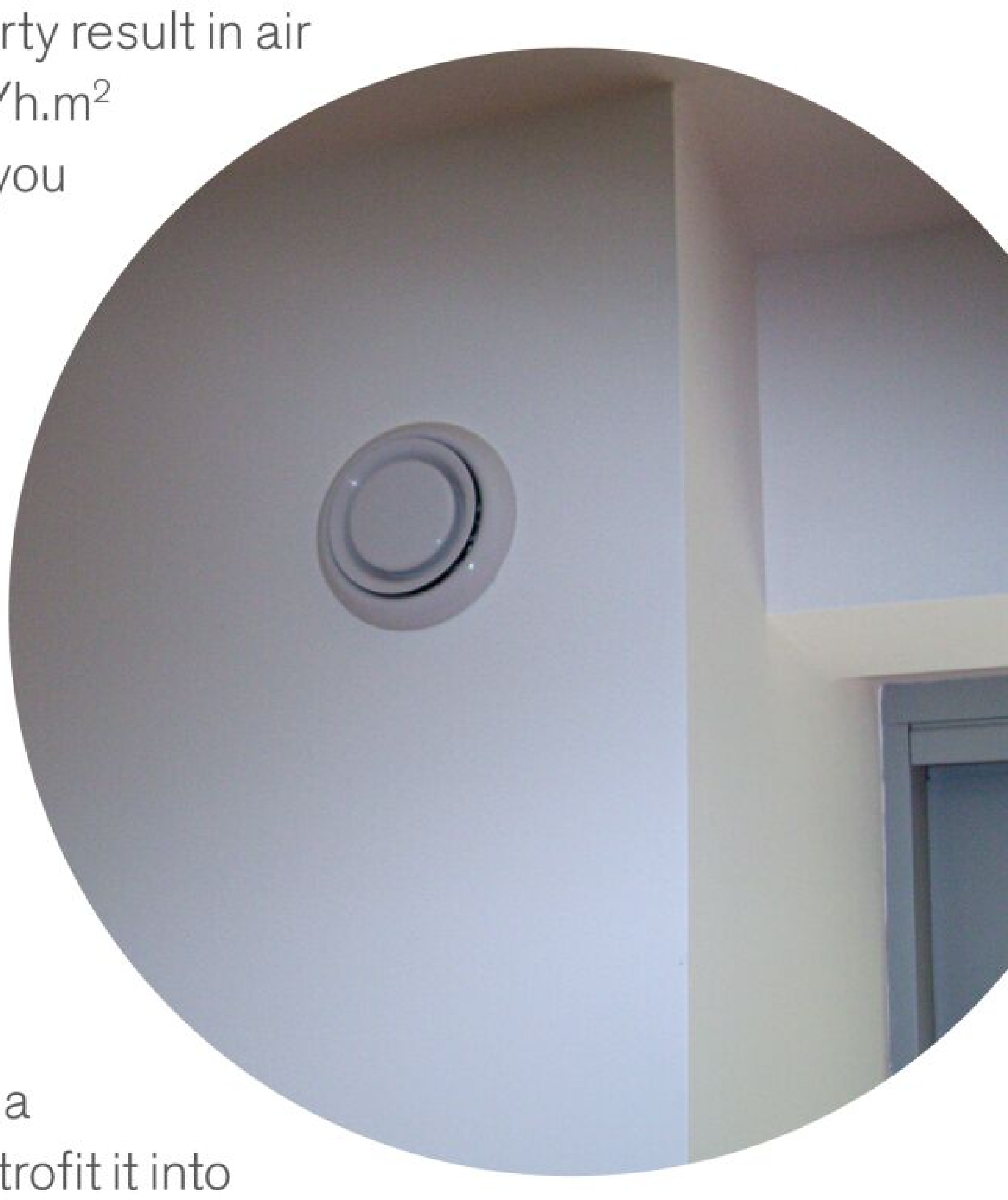
There are various types of dMVHR, but the most prevalent single-room solutions operate on a push-pull basis – essentially breathing air in and out as they switch between extraction and supply at regular intervals. "They change air flow direction every minute or two and recover some heat through a thermal storage element," says Stefan. "They're normally used in tandem with two or more systems. Brilliant in theory, though they're limited in terms of providing good air quality."

Above: In this installation by Rega Vent, exposed MVHR ducting brings an industrial flourish to the decor of the property

Right: Ventilation terminals can be wall mounted, as high as possible, if you can't route duct to a ceiling of a room. Total Home Environment provided the MVHR system for this retrofit project

Is installing MVHR worth it?

Whether in the form of extra insulation in your floors, walls and roof, or the installation of new windows, if thermal upgrades to your property result in air tightness levels of 5m^3/h.m^2 @50Pa or better, then you will need to consider mechanical ventilation. At this level of airtightness, trickle vents alone will not provide adequate ventilation.



MVHR offers an appealing solution that can also improve air quality and make your heating system more efficient, plus there are a number of options to retrofit it into an existing property. If you're installing a whole house system there will, of course, be some disruption. "However, the health benefits for you and your home, as well as the reduction in heating costs, should make this worthwhile in the long run," says Clarissa.

CONTACTS **Beam Central Systems** 028 7963 2424 www.beamcentralsystems.com **BPC Ventilation** www.bpcventilation.com **Mark Heat Recovery** 07547 163939 www.markheatrecoverysystems.co.uk **Paul Heat Recovery** 01383 221255 www.paulheatrecovery.co.uk **Rega Vent** 01767 600499 www.rega-uk.com **Rise Design Studio** 020 4538 4120 www.risedesignstudio.co.uk **Total Home Environment** 0345 260 0123 www.totalhome.co.uk **Vent-Axia** 0344 856 0590 www.vent-axia.com

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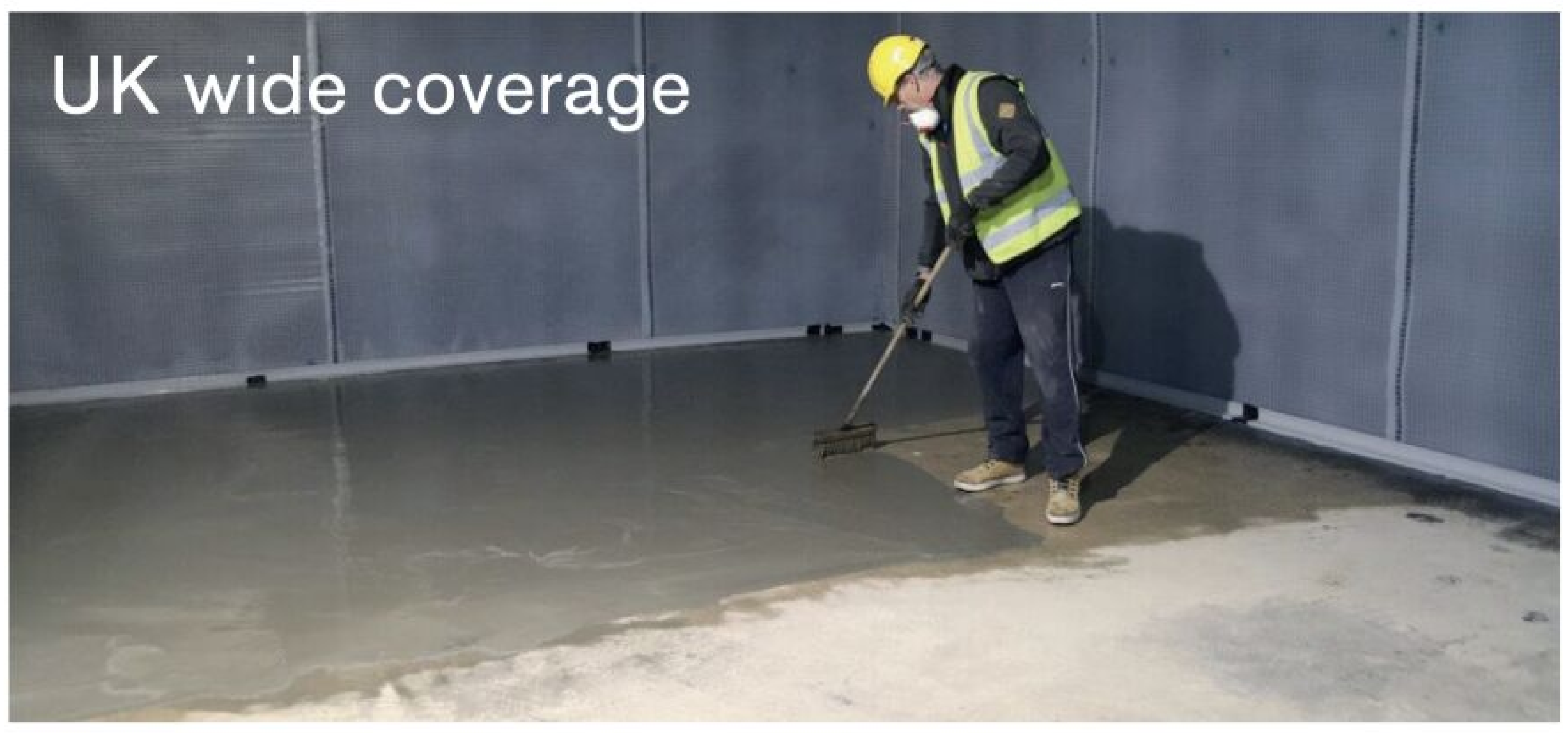

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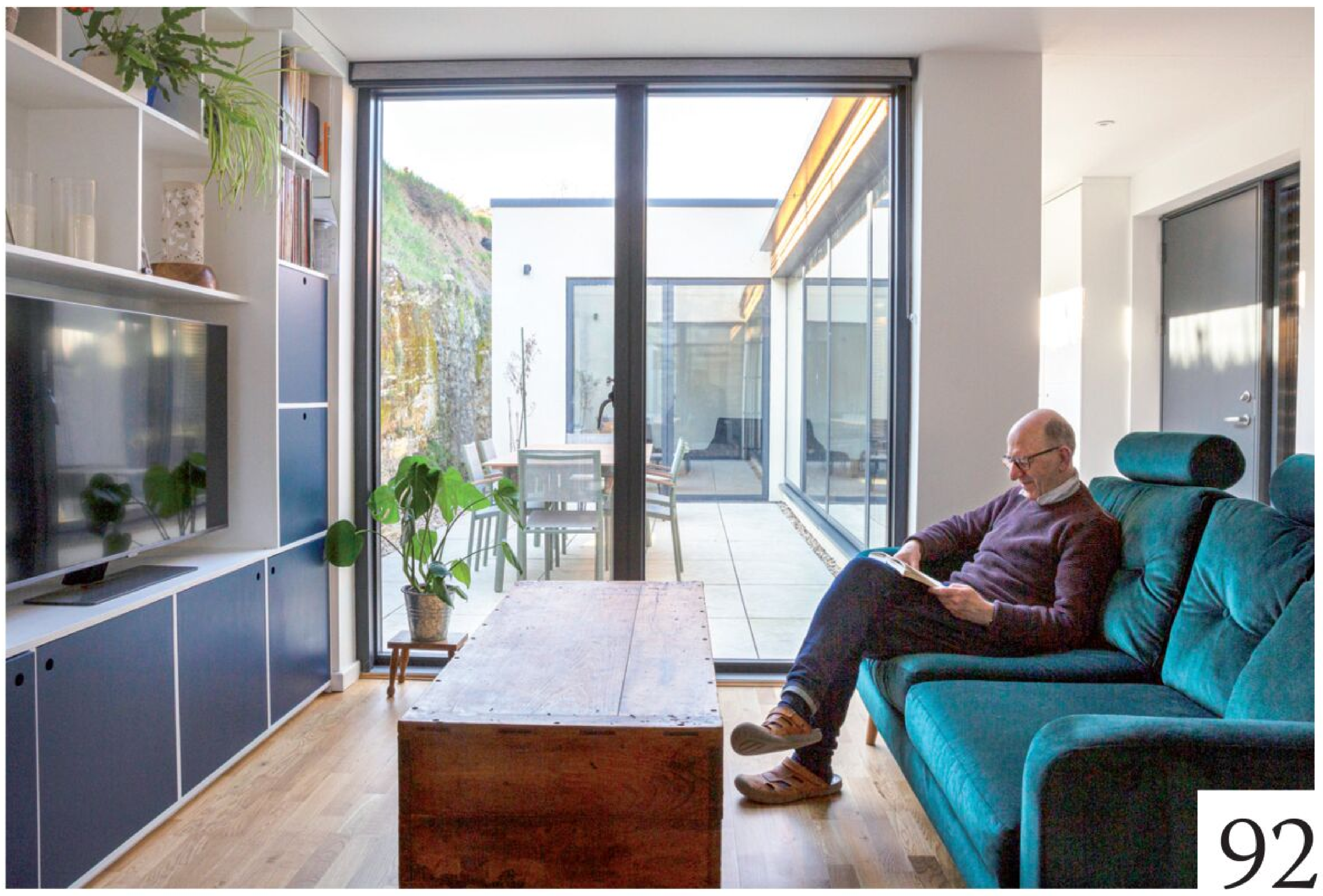

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How to **collaborate successfully with architects**

Architect Julian Owen explores what you need to consider when engaging with an architect to make your build a triumph

DAVID BARBOUR

Right: Looking to downsize and build a new home on her own land, Fiona Henderson approached Fiddes Architects (www.fiddesarchitects.com) to help take her ideas from a concept to a buildable reality. “Following an initial chat with our architect Eoghain, he came out to my house and took the time to find out how I lived in it and how I used it,” says Fiona. This informed the finished result, which is perfectly tailored to her needs

Creating the design is one of the most enjoyable (and less stressful) stages of your building project. To get a first-class result that makes the most out of your budget, you may well want to collaborate with an architect. Even for a modest extension, there are hundreds of design decisions to be made, let alone for a whole house. Luckily, many of the minor choices and more technical stuff can be safely left to the designer. Your job as captain of the ship is to steer the architectural plans in the right direction and keep it on course throughout the journey. Here are a few golden rules to help you and your team along the way.

Choosing an architect

Firstly, you need to decide what type of architect you need. Assuming that you are selecting from a list of competent professionals, you will find that there are big differences in the level and quality of service offered. Some –often the cheaper, less qualified ones – will have a brief discussion with you, then go away, speedily draw up a scheme and present it to you a few weeks later expecting to be paid on the nail, with maybe a few very minor amendments. You should not engage this type of designer unless you already have your own very well worked out plans and just need someone to draw them up. In which case you won't have to read the rest of this article.

What most people need is someone who will take the time to understand your particular needs and blend your ideas with their own, making suggestions that you may not have considered. As well as being good at the creative side, it is also important that they understand how to build what they draw – which is usually the case if they are qualified technologists or architects.

The communication process starts before you've made the appointment. Obviously, you need to be reasonably sure that your personalities and ways of working will match, but there are some specific personality traits to look for. Do they seem to be listening to what you are saying? A few designers can be quite bad at this, especially if they are very skilled but have not worked much with private clients. They may well be too busy thinking of their own ideas, and are less interested in what you might want. A clue is when they quote their fee. Is it just a generalised percentage or hourly rate, with their standard terms and conditions attached? Or do they take the trouble to record their understanding of your outline brief? If they are good communicators, they will clearly set out their fees and a timescale for their work, and explain some of the more important standard terms and conditions in plain English.

Creating a design brief

Once they're on board you need to agree a detailed brief. It doesn't have to be exhaustive or even final, but it must cover those aspects of the design that are most important to you. The architect can then take this and add their own questions and suggestions to it. The brief should be seen as a document that evolves with the scheme and should be modified as new ideas are introduced, and old ones are ruled out as impractical. It should encompass more than just a list of rooms. With a bit of work it can include approximate dimensions, likely furniture needed and other details. Once you agree the common ground, the architect is well place to start on the initial sketches.

Keeping up communication

If you are one of a couple, or part of a bigger family, nominate one person to act as point of contact. This is helpful if you are quite busy and will not always be able to speak to the architect together. The designer should do the same if there is more than one person working on their team, and they should be in regular contact with you. If they are unavoidably busy on another project that has reached a crucial stage, or going off on holiday, they should warn you that they might be out of contact for a week or two, especially if the programme is slipping.

You should also agree some ground rules to help communications run smoothly. Aspects of the design

MATTHEW SMITH

Above: Snell David Architects (www.snell-david.co.uk) completely opened up this grade II listed, oak frame thatched property. The owners wanted a large kitchen-diner zone that would provide exciting and functional spaces for entertaining, whilst remaining sensitive to the home's heritage charm

QUESTIONS FROM YOUR ARCHITECT

There are some typical questions a good architect will want answered before they start any design work. It's a sensible idea to have some answers prepared for your first consultation to make sure the whole team is working towards the same goals.

1 **What is the budget** and the approximate floor area of the building work?

2 **What quality are you looking for?** Just saying 'average' is not good enough. It helps if you have pictures of the end result you hope to achieve.

3 **Who will live in the house** and what are their needs and relationships – e.g. parents and children, live-in relatives, likely visiting guests?

4 **Is there a preferred number of floor levels?** Such as a second floor, room in the roof or a basement.

5 **Which rooms and spaces** are desirable, a luxury or only to be accommodated if possible.

6 **What are the specific uses** of each room. Who will use them, and can you supply details of larger items of furniture and their likely contents?

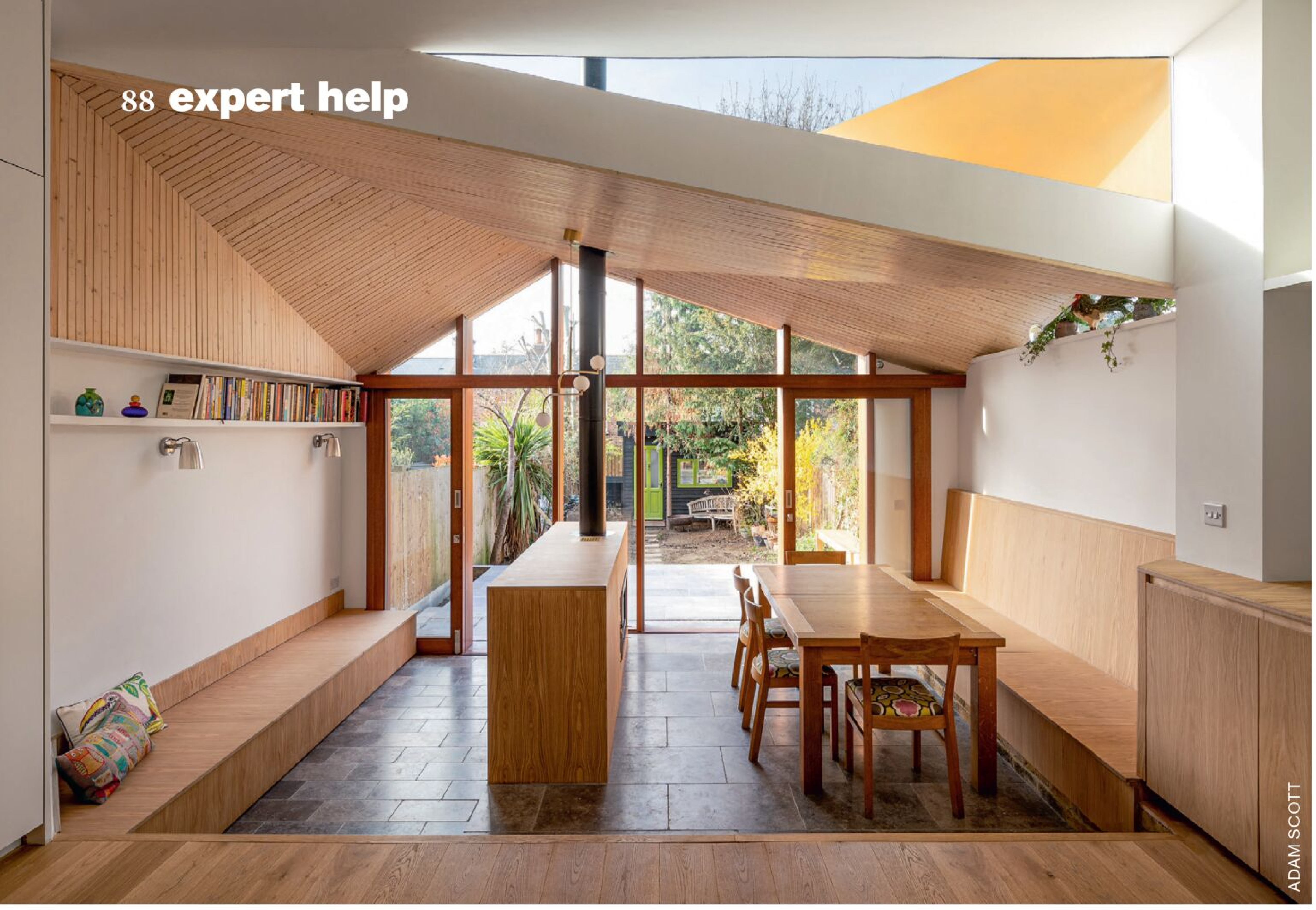
7 **Which areas can be open plan** and which need to be separate, quiet spaces. Also, how will these different zones all join up?

8 **Which rooms should get the benefit of the sun** and at what times of day?

9 **Where are the best views into the garden** and how will the house link to it?

10 **What level of energy efficiency** and sustainability are you aiming for?

11 **How will the house relate** to the site and its location on the plot?



ADAM SCOTT

MATTHEW SMITH

Above: As keen nature lovers, these homeowners wanted to create a space inspired by a beloved tree that sat adjacent to the home's original kitchen. Turner Architects (www.turnerarchitects.co.uk) embraced natural tones, wooden surfaces and organic-feeling materials when developing the plan for this family-friendly extension

Right: Butcher Bayley Architects (www.wearebba.co.uk) designed this bold, copper-clad extension to reflect the young, modern family's personality. Details such as the handmade terracotta tiles were inspired by the owner's childhood in Italy

where there may be a difference of opinion must be discussed respectfully, but you should always be able to have the final say when to move on. They should keep you informed of what they are up to and copy you into all emails exchanged with other interested parties, such as planners. Crucially, the architect should always discuss any major changes that they are considering making to the design before they make them, especially if they conflict with the current brief. This avoids their time being wasted on a red herring and keeps you in control of what they are doing to achieve your design goals.

Agree your preferred method of communication. Some people prefer to use emails, texts and WhatsApp messages, but any crucial discussions should be on the phone, in person or via an online meeting, perhaps followed up by an email confirming what has been discussed. Emails are very tempting for both parties, but they lack nuance and have been the cause of many unnecessary arguments because their tone or meaning has been misinterpreted. Having meetings online can also be very productive as the architect can put the CAD drawings up on the screen, enlarge views and even make amendments as you discuss any potential issues you see with the architectural plans.

Dealing with disagreements

As your discussions develop, try to be open to suggestions where your initial ideas can be modified. Resist the temptation to just say that the early drawings are 'wrong' because they don't suit exactly what you want. It is rare for these first sketches to be spot on and within reason that's ok, because they should be testing ideas out on you, to make sure they are on right track. If an architect has an idea, the most effective way for them to explain it is to draw it. It may help clear up a genuine misunderstanding, or suggest an alternative approach to the brief, or it may be that it is impossible to reconcile all your ideal requirements of the project.

If you're not happy with an aspect of the design, be polite but frank about your reservations. Accept that ideas are being tested and rejected as part of the design process. Architects are well used to criticism and will not take offence. As long as they can understand why you don't like it, the next attempt will be closer to the answer. Just bear in mind that if you make a very late change to an important aspect of the brief, this will be frustrating for the designer. The decent thing to do is to pay some extra fees to cover the time needed for a significant redesign. Very occasionally the architect might warn you that they don't believe part of the current design will work. You don't necessarily have to concede this, as long as you understand the risk you are taking and accept it if it doesn't pay off later. They work for you and unless there is some kind of extraordinary situation, such as health and safety hazard, they should note your decision and do as you ask. It has to be said that this scenario most often occurs in relation to aesthetic issues and the build cost.

JULIAN OWEN

Julian Owen is an East Midlands-based chartered architect and author of several books on self build and house alterations. His publications include Self Build, Home Extension Design and Kit and Modern Timber Frame Homes. He's also the founder of the ASBA Architects network. To find out more visit www.asba-architects.org.

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Protek's **Simon Middleton** looks at the key pre-start steps you should take when converting an existing building

How to plan & protect your conversion project

The allure of converting unconventional buildings such as lighthouses, barns, chapels and industrial units has long captivated self builders. These ambitious projects offer the prospect of a truly individual home, potentially in a location where it would otherwise be impossible to get planning. They can be full of construction challenges, but the resulting spaces are breathtaking, making them truly exciting projects to be involved with. Yet there are some considerations to bear in mind and, as with any project, it's important to protect your investment.

At Protek, we've seen a 10.6% increase in the number of conversion projects being insured this year – fuelled by the evolving landscape of permitted development rights, such as Class Q agricultural-to-residential.

Due diligence

Conversions often present a greater level of complexity due to the inherent uncertainties associated with existing structures. Unlike new builds, where the substrate is known and controlled, conversions can harbour concealed structural issues that can lie dormant beneath the surface for decades.

Establishing the unknowns through comprehensive early investigations is paramount. This phase should include foundation checks to ascertain the building's integrity and load-bearing capacity, as well as assessments to identify any structural weaknesses, deterioration or poor prior alterations.

The insights gleaned from these investigations are key to developing an accurate and realistic project budget. Failing to invest adequately in early-stage due diligence can lead to costly unforeseen issues emerging later on.

Common issues

Protek's structural warranty surveyors repeatedly see instances where robust planning has been missed. On one project, work began to increase room height by reducing floor levels, only to find the walls were not actually formed on any meaningful foundation. The resulting underpinning was expensive, time consuming and – working on an unstable wall – difficult to execute.

Your project is at greatest risk when the roof is off and the walls exposed. It doesn't take too much of a gust to destroy an exposed wall – conversion or new build. In fact, walls (especially unpropped gables) being blown down is one of the most prevalent storm claims we see. Careful management of the works, including temporarily bracing unsupported walls, is key.

The building's condition, location and lie of the land can make it tricky to create a perfectly dry living space. Sloping sites and high moisture levels in the existing structure will require comprehensive tanking solutions, with perfectly linked DPC and DPM arrangements that follow the product specification exactly. Simply lapping a membrane part way up the internal wall is unlikely to be acceptable, as experience dictates this often leads to major problems down the line.

The path to success

It's helpful to think of your conversion project as an exercise in financial risk mitigation. Engage professionals to thoroughly assess the entire structure, and ensure you know exactly what works must be carried out, and when, to maintain its integrity.

Avoid commencing work without the benefit of approved detailed drawings. While it might save time and cost initially, the lack of clarity in a Building Notice significantly increases the likelihood of encountering problems and queries from building control later on. Investing in detailed design at the outset provides a clear roadmap and facilitates a smoother build.

You can gain significant protection and peace of mind by securing site insurance and a 10-year structural warranty from the outset. Reputable providers typically review the design and conduct regular monitoring of the conversion works as they progress. This helps mitigate the risks of poor design and substandard workmanship.

Importantly, a structural warranty provides valuable protection against potential liability under the Defective Premises Act, which can extend for several years after the completion of the project – including if the property is subsequently sold. A comprehensive warranty can also be a big asset when seeking a mortgage or marketing the completed property to prospective buyers, providing an added layer of assurance regarding the quality and structural integrity of the conversion.

Above: Barns have huge potential for conversion into wow-factor homes, but there will often be unexpected issues to contend with along the way

SIMON MIDDLETON is managing director of Protek Group. Since starting his career as a site engineer, he has been underwriting site insurance and structural warranty in the self build and construction sector for over 25 years. For more information speak to the team by calling **0333 456 8030** or log on to **www.protekselfbuild.co.uk**

Brownfield sites

what do you need to know?

Often located in urban areas, these plots can offer the perfect opportunity to create your dream bespoke home. **Julia Riddle** explores the ins and outs

Right & below: Build It readers David and Jenny Bird self built a new, single-storey home on a brownfield site, bordering a disused quarry in Oxfordshire, just inches from the excavation wall. The house's flat roofs feature solar panels on one side, with a single-ply membrane and sedum planting on the other

TOM PILSTON

Finding a plot for your dream house is always one of the biggest challenges in any project, closely followed by understanding what you can build on that site. Some types of land are generally more suitable for delivering a new home, and brownfield sites certainly offer strong potential for development.

In planning terms, the government has long made it clear that brownfield sites are the priority and the preferred location for growth, rather than previously undeveloped land. But are they easy to build on, and what do you need to know about this kind of site?

What is a brownfield plot?

A brownfield site is a piece of land that has previously been built on. It doesn't need to have been covered with houses or buildings, but there will have been some previous development on the site. They could be positioned in both urban and rural locations. Generally, however, the development of these sites is intended to be the solution to avoid urban sprawl and development in the countryside, so they will usually be in areas surrounded by other development, but not always.

What are the benefits?

It should be assumed that you'll require full planning permission to build a new home on a brownfield site. If a plot has already been subject to development, there is already a principle established in planning terms. Brownfield sites can therefore offer a smoother journey to securing planning consent over greenfield plots, as it'll generally be easier to build something on land that has been developed in the past, than one that has not.

BROWNFIELD SITE SUMMARY

- In principle, development is supported on brownfield sites.
- The extent of development will be considered in the context of what was there previously and any other surrounding constraints.
- There may be remediation requirements, depending on the previous use, which could be costly and/or time consuming.
- The development of brownfield sites can be challenging if they are restricted, small or difficult to access.
- Considerations are often like any other planning application in terms of design, appearance, amenity, sustainability and other matters.

A site that has previously been built on is more likely to already have services in place (such as drainage and electricity), than a rural, countryside site. This can offer advantages in both the time and cost of bringing utilities to the land, while also providing greater certainty that this is achievable – especially in comparison to a site that may never have had active services before.

What should you be wary of?

Just because a site has been built on previously, and planning favours brownfield land, it doesn't eliminate all challenges. Depending on the plot's unique history, it may have been used for a purpose that calls for some kind of remediation. For example, if it was used for a car garage or a light industrial building that may have affected the ground conditions in some way, you may need to examine the ground and remediate any potential issues before a house can be built. This can take time and will come with additional, and perhaps unexpected costs. This is important where a site meets the traditional definition of brownfield, by being a previous industrial location, which will almost certainly require remedial groundworks.

Any works may need consideration through surveys before a site goes through planning or to satisfy a lender. If there is a chance of contamination, it's also likely that there will be a planning condition requiring proof that this has been adequately addressed. This information will need to be submitted to planning officers and passed to the relevant team for consideration and agreement in order to proceed with development.

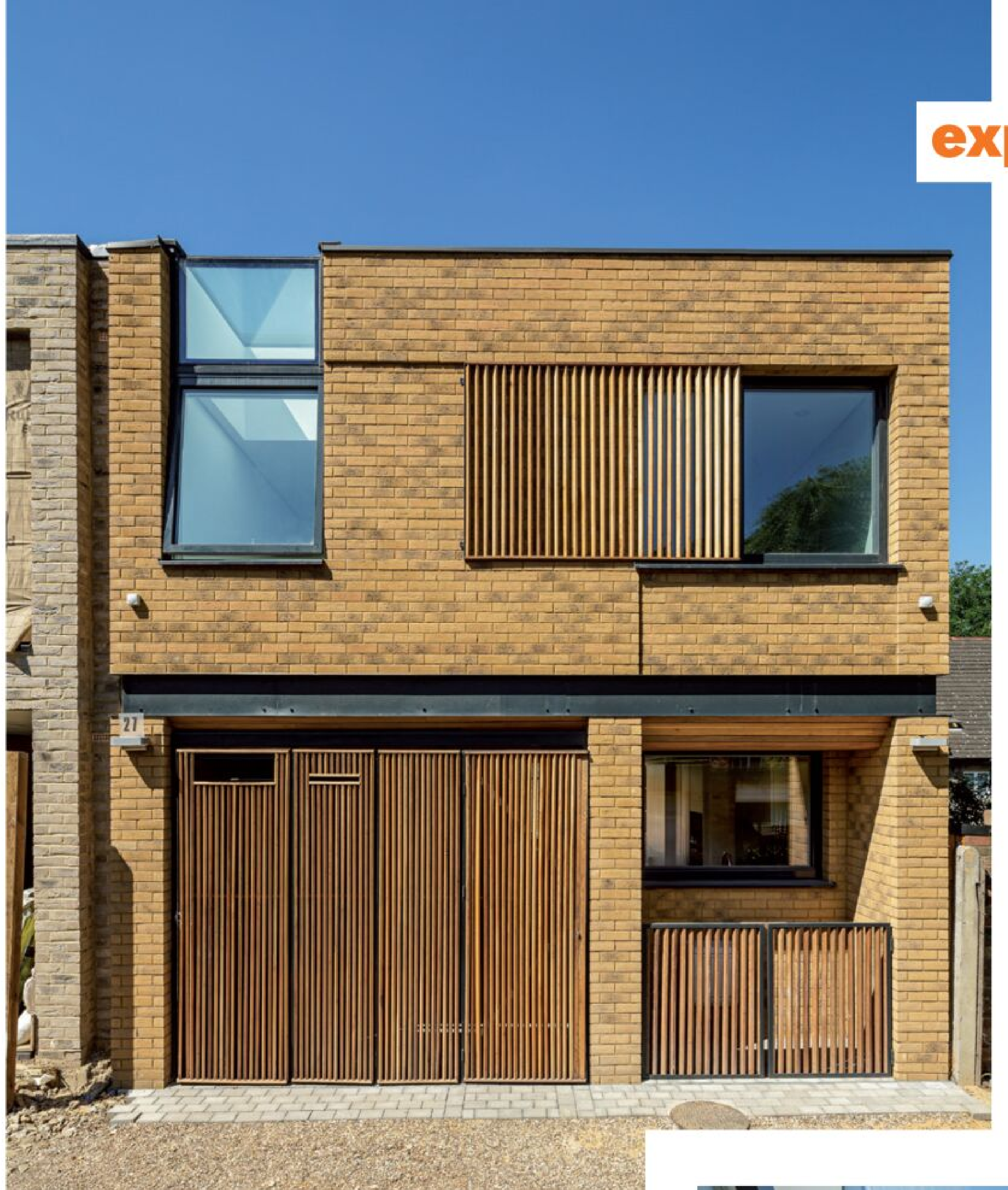
If a site has been built on in the past, but the structures have been disused for many years or have fallen into a dilapidated state, they may be deemed as abandoned in planning terms. This means that the lawful use may have fallen away. For example, if a site had a house on it many years ago, which has partially collapsed and not been occupied for several years, this does not mean you can automatically rebuild that dwelling.

If it is deemed to have been abandoned, it will be treated as a new application for residential development, as if the site was undeveloped. The principle of there having been a property there in the past will, however, have some positive bearing in the planning application.

If the structure has all but disappeared – ie, if it has been derelict for many years and become overgrown to the extent it can no longer be seen, or was demolished, then the site is unlikely to still be deemed brownfield.

If a plot of land already has a property on it, this may need demolishing, depending on its condition. If this is in a conservation area, permission would be needed for any work. The process of demolition and removal of the building materials will also be costly and may implicate the project schedule. The existence of a structure or building on a site does not automatically mean it can be replaced, but it is likely that something can be rebuilt in this location, and of a similar size.

Building on a brownfield site will also require you to consider improving the ecology and, depending on the project, contribute towards biodiversity net gain (BNG). Self build projects are currently exempt from BNG requirements, but if a development is not self or custom build by definition, then this can be a high bar to achieve.



SIMON MAXWELL

Left and below: RDA Architects (www.rdauk.com) took on the challenge of designing this efficient, contemporary and cost-effective Passivhaus home, located on the site of a former garage. The self build's architecture is a contemporary rendition of the surrounding mews properties

Depending on the location of the plot, there will also be specific considerations in terms of the surrounding use. For example, are the nearby buildings still used commercially and might they have implications in terms of noise or air quality for the home you're looking to build? This may have specific requirements in terms of surveys and mitigation to ensure a good quality of living in the new property.

Other considerations

Once you have addressed the key factors relating to the site's use and extent of development possible, the other matters that are relevant for planning are broadly the same as other greenfield sites. This includes transport and access, design, ecology and amenities, as well as the impact and detail of design and materials.

There may also be construction considerations on tight or awkward brownfield sites. These might require careful design, as well as an innovative approach in terms of construction and access, which should be taken into consideration early on to ensure this will be achievable.

In principle, brownfield sites offer a great opportunity for development. They will be received more positively through planning than plots of land that have not been previously developed, but they do not come without their challenges, so be ready for these and seek early advice.

JULIA RIDDLE

Julia Riddle is a planning consultant with experience in advising on a range of commercial and residential developments. She runs Castle Planning (www.castleplanning.uk) and has written guidance to inform the national approach to Custom and Self Build and is a member of the Right to Build Task Force.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE GARDEN

Plan your garden early to boost biodiversity, protect the soil, and create a space that grows with you. From compost to paving, every choice counts, says eco expert Nigel Griffiths

Above: One of the joys of having outdoor space is being able to grow your own food. A great place to start is with a greenhouse. Finished in Reed Green, this bespoke Edwardian three-quarter span design, by White Cottage, adjoins an existing garden wall via a valley junction, blending beautifully into the garden and providing an ideal space for cultivating fruit, vegetables and flowers (www.whitecottage.co.uk)

In terms of sustainability, your outdoor space and how it is landscaped is just as important as the design and materials used for the house itself. Gardens provide much of the setting for a property, and enhance the beauty of the overall aesthetic. In addition, a garden offers us a place to relax and take leisure, a habitat for wildlife, and somewhere we can grow vegetables, herbs and more. The benefits of gardening to mental and physical health can hardly be overstated.

Process & Priorities

With all these benefits in mind, why is the garden so often left until last on self build schemes? It's frequently an afterthought, an adjunct to the main project – the dwelling. But by the time the house has been completed, the surrounding soil has often been removed, polluted or compressed. Whatever trees and shrubs may have been there originally may have been damaged or removed altogether, and the land used as a dumping ground for building materials or excavated spoil.

We all know that planning takes time, as does design and procurement. This is valuable time can be put to good use by observing, learning, protecting and planting. In the two or three years it can take for a build to begin, trees could be taking root and shrubs establishing themselves. These, along with any existing garden features, will need physical protection during construction – but the best safeguard is a well-briefed contractor. This fallow period is also the ideal opportunity to get to know your land: to see which plants appear across the seasons, to observe existing wildlife, and to start thinking about how to enhance habitats for the future.

To begin, it's helpful to set some priorities – do you want something low maintenance, or a garden largely given over to food production? If your priority is supporting wildlife, your garden will look very different from one designed for entertaining or family play. This decision will naturally guide you toward an initial design; this can evolve as the project progresses and the shape of the

Left: Composting is one of the best ways to create nutrient rich soil for your garden, and is a great way to reuse garden waste. This Slot Down Compost Bin (£139.99) can hold approximately 650L of green waste, and is suitable for kitchen scraps, too (www.forestgarden.co.uk) house is finalised. However, perimeter planting is rarely affected, so you can get started early with hedges and structural trees. On larger plots, you might even be able to get stuck in creating an orchard or a pond.

Whatever your priorities and design, you'll need to think about soil health, hard landscaping, water use, and ultimately providing an attractive and sustainable context for your new build house.

Soil health & composting

In our home's gardens, soil health is often better than in agricultural land, which has been intensively farmed, ploughed, drained of nutrients and treated with weed killers and artificial fertilisers. If you're starting your garden from scratch, topsoil can be imported, but it's much better to make your own.

You should begin your sustainable garden adventure with a compost heap. Much of the material which is cleared in the preparation of a site can be composted – even turf and larger woody material, which takes longer to break down, providing a habitat in the meantime.

If you have to move more quickly and space is at a premium, then the ash from a clean bonfire can happily be added to the compost heap. As you manage the site and clip the hedges, this will continue to fuel the heap in a positive cycle of sustainability. Actually, you'll need at least two if not three heaps, at different stages of decomposition, but make this space right at the start, asyou won't regret it. Adding the resulting composted material to your flower and vegetable beds will result in healthy soil structures that retain moisture and feed your plants. Don't use peat – its extraction destroys vital habitats, releases stored carbon, all while offering no essential benefits that compost can't provide itself.

Hard landscaping

Much of the environmental impact of building a garden arises from hard landscaping. The most sustainable products are those that are already there – reuse what you can. Sometimes there is an existing building to be demolished – this can yield bricks or stone to be used in paving or retaining walls, and concrete can be crushed for hardcore beneath a finished hard surface. Woody matter that is no use for construction can be chipped and laid for paths or just used as a mulch.

Next, in terms of impact, are recycled materials brought onto the site. While you're waiting for planning you can be keeping an eye out for bargains – often material which is free to collect via the likes of Freecycle. Local is optimal, especially where heavy items such as paving and topsoil are concerned. Reclaimed timber materials can often be used for constructing garden sheds, raised beds and pergolas, and reclaimed metal can provide elegant and unique structures for various climbing plants. The more reclaimed materials you can use in your project, the more you encourage recycling to happen in the first place.

New materials have a variety of different impacts. Some stone products are imported from abroad, and this is hard to justify when local alternatives are available. Concrete paving products are higher in embodied energy, but serve a useful purpose, are cheaper, and last well. Decking, being made of timber, is inherently eco-friendly – so

ISTOCK.COM/PETER SWAN

ENCOURAGING WILDLIFE

Trees provide not only structural landscaping features but also shade, roosts and nests for birds, and many also provide fruit. Dense hedges offer nesting opportunities and protection from predators but can also be used as corridors to connect wildlife within your site and in neighbouring properties.

It's a two-way process – the wildlife will repay you in different ways. Both native and non-native flowers, shrubs, and trees will attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies, while berry-producing plants feed birds throughout the year. Hedgehogs eat slugs, so do everything you can to encourage and protect them (and be very careful with the strimmer, especially in long grass). Dry stone walls are magnets for slow worms (which also eat slugs) and attract a variety of nesting insects.

Avoiding pesticides will help to maintain a healthy insect population – this is so important as they are near the bottom of the food chain in the ecosystem. Water features such as ponds will provide a different habitat entirely, but also drinking water for other wildlife. Lastly, purpose-made habitats such as bat and bird boxes can be used to enhance the natural environment that you are creating.

If you have the space, consider diverting part of your garden to a wildflower meadow, which will welcome pollinators and deliver a riot of summer colour

Left: Save on mains water use in your garden by using a water butt. This 200-litre Kingscote Rattan Water Butt, £500, is both stylish and sustainable. It's expertly hand-woven from grey rattan, made from a frost-resistant plant making it sturdy and durable (www.gardentrading.co.uk)

Right: Where recycled products from site are not an option, choosing a natural hard landscaping material will aid your sustainability credentials. Located next to an ancient woodland, this garden has been transformed from a simple patch of grass, to a beautiful and patio with planting using Quorn Stone's Dijon Tumbled Herringbone Cobbles, from £85 per m^2 (www.mystonefloor.com)

long as the timber is sustainably harvested and replanted; it is low on concrete use, has a relatively small carbon footprint, and will last a generation if properly maintained.

Drainage is highly site dependent, but whatever you can do to eliminate or slow down the passage of rainwater into the public drainage system will reduce the incidence of flooding downstream. This is known as sustainable drainage or SUDS and can be achieved in several ways:

- **Use permeable paving**, decking or gravel for hard surfaces;
- **Drain any impermeable hard surfaces** to soakaways (could just be a flower bed);
- **Harvest rainwater** from downpipes to rainwater butts;
- **Introduce holding ponds for rainwater** – which can then become a wildlife feature.

Front gardens, so frequently paved over for parking, should of course always have permeable surfacing.

Water use

As a proportion of our total household potable water use, garden watering is normally a fairly small percentage. Water butts will provide unchlorinated water for use in the garden, and it's quite rare to empty them – normally you have the opposite problem, and they are full to overflowing after periods of heavy rainfall.

Try to resist the urge to use mains water on lawn that turns brown – it's only the foliage that dies back in drought conditions, the roots are normally undamaged and the lawn will quickly recover once the rain returns. In my own garden, new plants might get some watering in the first few weeks if it's unusually dry weather, but after that they have two choices – live or die. As a result, my garden is full of plants that really want to be there, and can flourish in all conditions. In a broader sense, this comes down to using plants that are appropriate for the soil type, and for the conditions.

Above: To help you use your garden more, and appreciate its aesthetic, bin storage can transform your space. Made from natural timber, this Double Wheelie Bin Storage Shed, £319.99, is equipped with its own lifting mechanism, making it simple to use, and can be locked, too (www.sueryder.org/shop)

Possibly a larger water use in the garden these days may be jet-washing block paving and slabs, or even washing the car. There's no reason why harvested water can't be used for these purposes, though it will take a little design work and plumbing to get it set up effectively.

Garden storage

As we have gotten better at recycling, our bins have proliferated. In terraced streets in particular the front garden – if not given over to parking – has become a permanent bin store, despoiling the appearance of our lovely Georgian and Victorian streets with multiple coloured plastic containers.

If they really can't be stored at the rear of the property, then at least they can be covered over and hidden in bin stores, made from timber of course. Bike storage is more about security and protection from the weather and tends to be located in rear gardens than the front, but the more items that can be stashed out of view, the more the eye will be drawn to plants and trees that are really what gardens are all about.

Vegetables & herbs

Even the smallest gardens can produce food. There is nothing more rewarding than eating produce that you have grown yourself from seed, planted out, nurtured and harvested with care and patience. Assuming you avoid pesticides and artificial fertilisers, your produce will be chemical-free as well as tasty.

If you have very little space, you can grow herbs in containers. If you have more land available, you could add raised beds or a greenhouse, or a soft fruit area, or an orchard, then you can have year-round organic fruit and vegetables. It's not just the harvesting and eating that contributes to our mental and physical health, it's the soil preparation and the tending of the plants that gets us outdoors, listening to the birdsong, breathing fresh air, and enjoying the rest of the garden.

NIGEL GRIFFITHS

Nigel Griffiths specialises in sustainable construction and eco-renovation and is the author of the Haynes Eco House Manual. He advises UK government on retrofit programmes and inspects renewable heat installations on behalf of Ofgem. You can chat to Nigel at the Build It Live shows.

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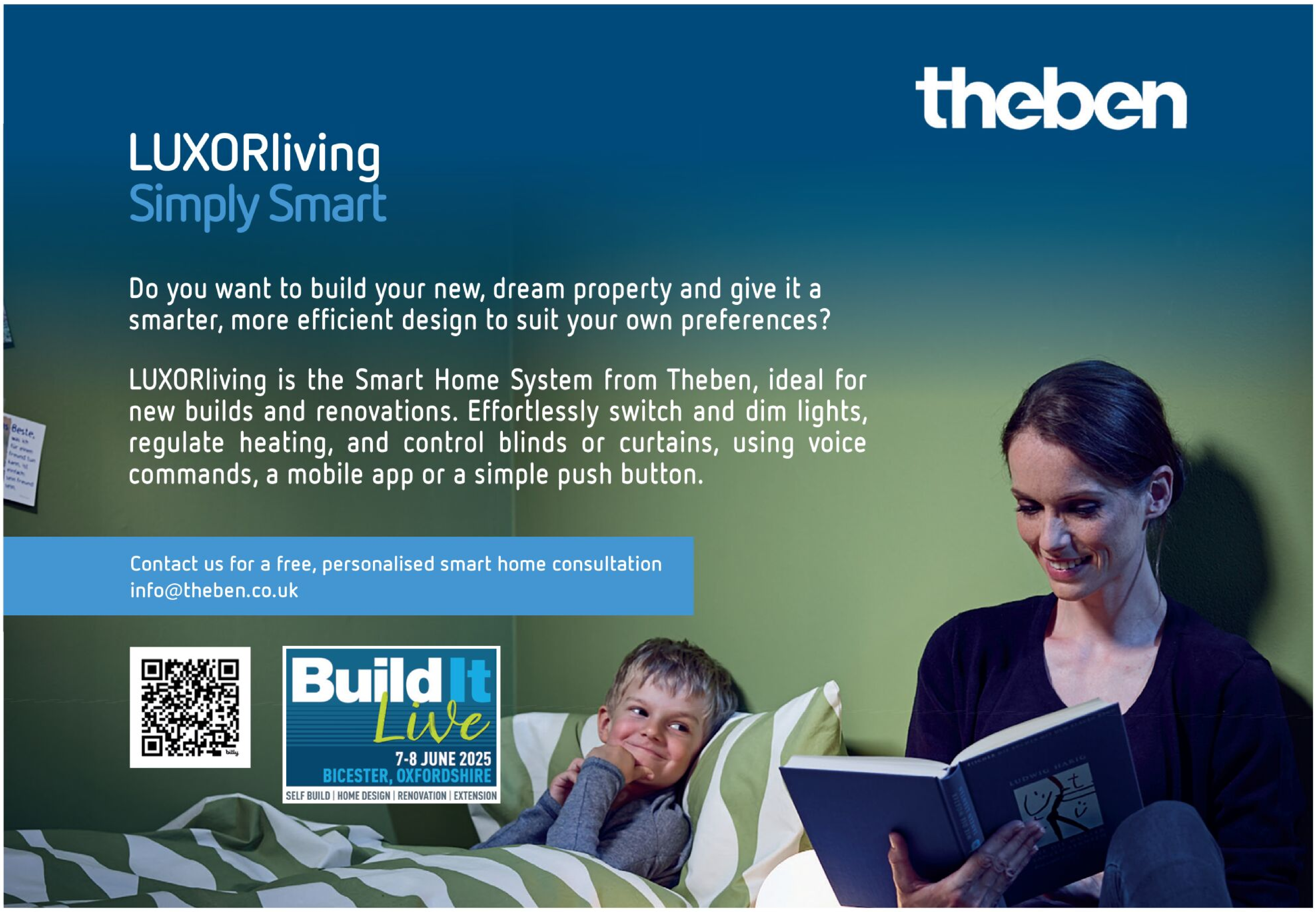

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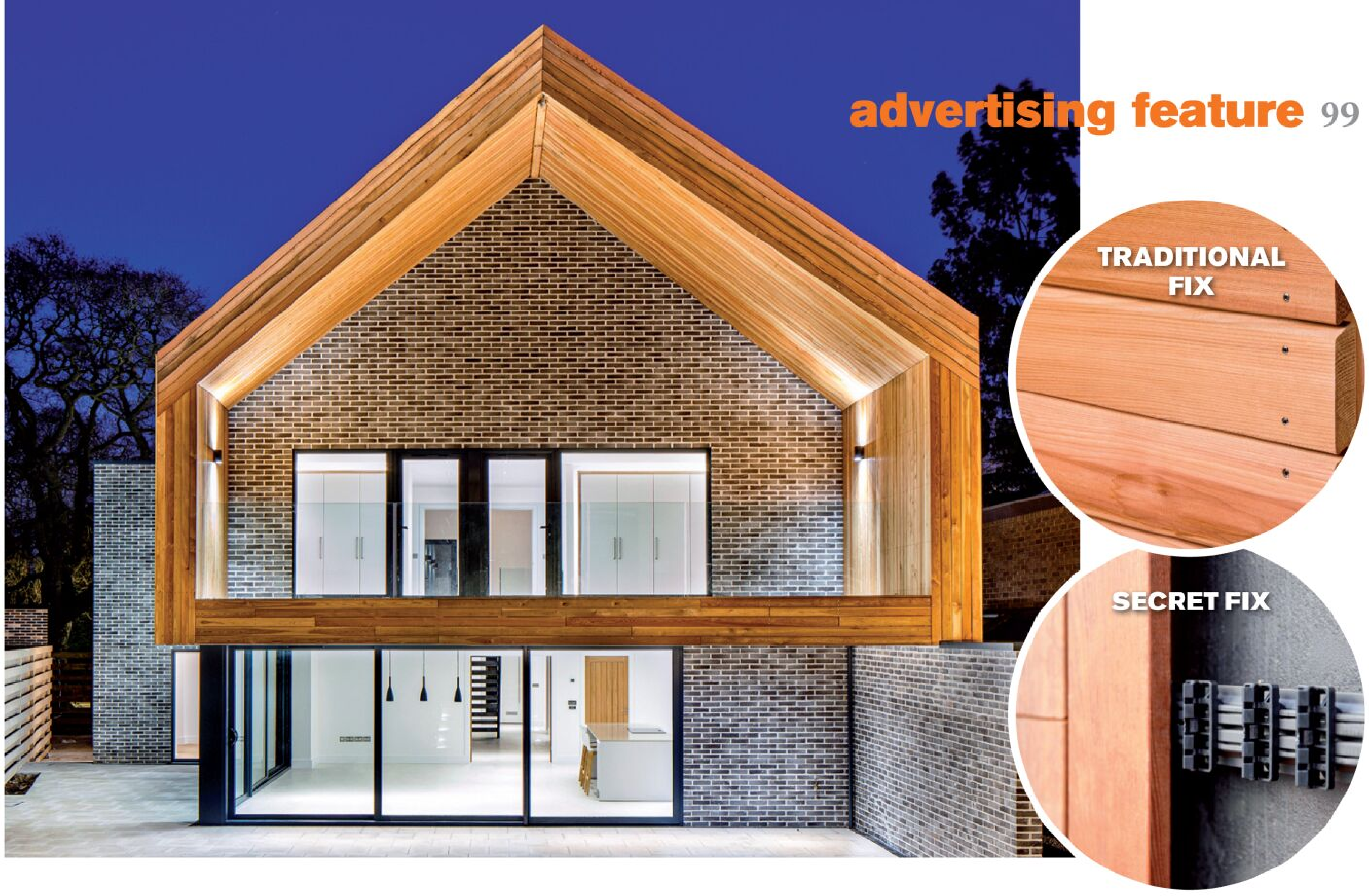

Detailed decisions have a huge impact on the final look and performance of your home. Steven Newman explains how specifying the right fixing system can enhance your cladding project

Timber cladding

traditional fix or secret fix?

Timber cladding remains a top choice for self builders and renovators, offering natural beauty, great sustainability credentials and versatility in design. Whether you're aiming for a traditional or modern aesthetic, it brings a warmth and character that few materials can match. Achieving a high-quality finish, however, depends not only on timber species and profile selection but also on how it's fixed to the building. All of these factors affect the finished appearance and performance.

Nailing the basics

Regardless of fixing method, certain principles apply to most wood cladding projects. Timber is hygroscopic, which means that it absorbs and releases moisture based on environmental conditions, expanding and contracting with seasonal changes. To manage this natural movement and avoid issues like cupping or warping, movement gaps must be incorporated into the design to ensure the cladding remains stable and performs as expected over time.

A breathable membrane is essential for protecting the building envelope, allowing moisture to escape whilst preventing it from penetrating the structure. Most cladding systems need a ventilated cavity, usually created with battens, to promote airflow behind the boards and reduce the risk of decay.

Traditional fix

The most common fixing method uses nails or screws driven through the face of each timber board into the support battens. The key benefit of this is that the material costs are low, it's easy to understand and accessible for most installers. High-quality stainless steel fixings – such as Millworks' MillFix range, designed specifically for cladding applications – are preferred for external use, as these resist the corrosion and staining that can occur with galvanised or coated alternatives.

While traditional fix is simple and reliable, it has drawbacks. Visible fixings can disrupt a clean design, especially in contemporary projects. Plus, improper installation can create points for moisture ingress, which can damage the cladding boards.

Secret fix

Recently, there's been a shift in design preferences towards clean, minimalist exteriors. As part of this, open rainscreen cladding profiles have gained popularity. These offer a crisp, linear aesthetic that can be compromised by visible screw heads, making traditional fixing less suitable.

Secret fix systems have therefore emerged as the preferred method for achieving a clean facade. These conceal the fixings entirely, using clips or interlocking profiles to secure the boards without visible fasteners. Beyond improving aesthetics, they also enhance performance by reducing moisture ingress points and helping to maintain the integrity of timber finishes.

Merging Millworks' timber expertise with Grad's clip technology, the Grad x Millworks system delivers on all fronts. Cladding boards are grooved on the reverse and mounted to aluminium rails using pre-fitted clips to ensure consistent spacing between boards and automatically allow for movement. This eliminates the need for gap setting – a key detail that must be undertaken manually with traditional-fix methods – and makes it easy to realise complex designs with precision and efficiency.

With no visible screws to align or fix, the system also speeds up installation, reducing on site labour. Plus, the Grad rails incorporate built-in ventilation, so there's no need for counter-battens, delivering a fixing system that's as durable as your timber cladding.

Which is best?

While secret fix systems may involve higher upfront costs and more detailed specification, their aesthetic and technical advantages are significant. Ultimately, the fixing method should align with your design goals and the technical demands of your build. Understanding your options early and consulting with your architect, installer or timber supplier will help to ensure your cladding performs beautifully and lasts for years to come.

Above: This project was realised using a traditional-fix system, with the heads unapologetically on show. Aligning fixings with this much precision takes time, patience and skill from quality installers

Inset top: MillFix screws feature a small, ornamental countersunk head designed to finish flush with the board surface

Inset above: Grad x Millworks uses factory-installed, pre-spaced clips to deliver a clean finish and faster installation, thus reducing the cost of skilled labour

STEVEN NEWMAN is the founder of Millworks. He shapes the company's values with a passion for research, development and long-term investment. Through prioritising innovation and quality, Millworks combines advanced engineering with strong knowledge of timber behaviour, delivering high-performance solutions that support self builders and renovators. For guidance on selecting the best cladding and installation system for your project, get in touch with the team online at **www.millworks.co.uk** or call **01223 967733**.

Renovation mortgages

DAVID BARBOUR

Thinking of tackling a home upgrade? Then you might need a specialist finance product to unlock your project, says Mark Stevenson

Above & inset: The Woods undertook a complete renovation and retrofit of this 1980s bungalow, transforming it into an ultra-sleek, modern abode that's unrecognisable from its original aesthetic. Clad in zinc and with plenty of full-height glazing, this unique home – designed by NVDC Architects (www.nvdc.co.uk) – suits the owners' lifestyle perfectly. The project took around 11 months to complete and cost £731,000

Whether you're planning to bring a derelict cottage back to life or turn a tired house into your dream home, renovation can cost more than expected. One of the most important parts of the process is financial planning.

Money can make or break a renovation project. Getting your finances right isn't just about how much you can borrow. It's about understanding the renovation journey, working out realistic budgets, and securing the right mortgage product that's flexible enough to support the ups and downs of this type of development.

A lot of people assume that once they've got a mortgage offer, they can just crack on. But when you're buying a property that's in poor condition – or even uninhabitable – you'll often need a very specific kind of finance product. That's where renovation mortgages come in.

What is a renovation mortgage?

It's a specialist type of loan for people buying a home in need of a refurb. While a traditional mortgage is based on the value of a property at the time of purchase, a renovation mortgage accounts for property value when the works are complete. This helps to fund home purchases that perhaps don't have a working kitchen or need structural repairs.

Unlike regular mortgages, which usually release funds in one go, renovation products are structured to release money in stages. There're lots of different products available, some of which are engineered to help cashflow. You can opt for arrears or advance stage payments – either getting money after each stage of work is complete, or before each phase begins, based on estimated costs.

This flexibility along with the option to borrow against the future value of the property, makes a renovation mortgage ideal for anyone taking on a project that is going to require a lot of upfront work.

What kind of projects does it suit?

Not every project is the same. Some might involve a cosmetic refresh – new flooring, a kitchen refit, knocking through a few walls – while others involve gutting the place completely or even doing structural rebuilds. Renovation mortgages are ideal for the more ambitious projects that wouldn't qualify for a standard mortgage because they're not technically habitable. That might be a house with no heating, plumbing, or electrics. Or when taking on a property that's no more than a 'shell' that needs everything from a new roof to underpinned foundations.

Renovation mortgages are also a great choice for barn conversions or when converting non-residential buildings into homes. Other projects might include period properties in need of sympathetic restoration, properties with damp or subsidence issues, or even unmodernised homes stuck in

CASE STUDY WHAT TO BUDGET FOR QUALITY FENESTRATION

PROJECT Renovation & extension

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GLAZING PRODUCTS USED Heritage-style flush casements, bay windows, fixed glazing, external doors and a contemporary sliding door system

COST GUIDE The installed price for this project came to £42,155 +VAT

Clapgate House is a culmination of one family's dream to revamp their home, creating better living spaces, bringing the outside in and achieving high-quality finish. The owners chose Southern Contractors (www.southern-contractors.co.uk) to realise the project.

The existing parts of the house underwent a full refurb – including replastering, upgraded flooring and adding new bathrooms, as well as knocking through to add a full double-storey side extension, providing around 90m^2 of extra floorspace. The new part of the building features a complementary roof pitch, plus details such as off-white painted brickwork and sage green detailing at bargeboards, window cills and DPC level – giving the impression this wing has always been there.

Getting the fenestration right is key to any project – helping deliver the right look and representing a core part of your project budget – so choosing a quality supplier is vital. "We always use TP Improvements, as they offer an amazing service for our clients," says Rob Quayle, owner of Southern Contractors. "The decisions we made on the glazing were a collaborative effort between us, TP and the homeowners."

Most the windows and external doors are timber, with the project encompassing nine casement windows, a bay window and two fixed windows – all with flush sashes – with solid black ironmongery from Glyngary (www.glyngary.co.uk). This is complemented with a single stable door (boarded and insulated in the bottom section, with toughened glass above), solid front door with ring door knocker and open-in letterbox, plus a pair of flush French doors. All these timber products were supplied in kiln-dried West African sapele and factory-finished with three coats of microporous paint.

To achieve that coveted indoor-outdoor connection, Cortizo's thermally-broken COR Vision aluminium sliding door was specified – featuring elegant 20mm sightlines to open up the views. "Everyone's delighted with the project, including the clients, who've asked us back to do extra bits and pieces since," says Rob.

For more information call 01372 203040 or visit www.tpimprovements.com

the 1970s – all of these can benefit from this type of funding. When it comes to the suitability of a renovation mortgage, the key is the potential to add value. They help to bridge the gap between a property's current state and value what it will be worth once it's finished.

How to get a good deal

Renovation mortgages are more complex than typical home loans, so preparation is essential. Lenders are investing in you and your project just as much as in the property itself. They'll want to see you've done your homework.

You'll need a clear renovation plan that includes architectural drawings (if necessary), a full breakdown of costs, a build schedule, and cashflow. It all must make sense, so the more detailed, the better to demonstrate that you've thought everything through.

To prove your case, you'll need realistic quotes from builders, a contingency for unexpected costs, and confirmation of planning permission. Some lenders might also require full plans approval for building control before too much money is released.

Affordability plays a big part, and even though renovation mortgages are based partly on the property's end value, lenders want reassurance you can afford the repayments. So, make sure your finances are in good shape – having a decent credit score, low existing debt, and a steady income

DAVID BARBOUR & CRAMOND RENOVATIONS

Above & left: For their extension and renovation project, Lia and Allan Gill transformed a 1970s bungalow into a characterful, contemporary home. The project cost £240,000 and took six months to complete. The house now has easy access to a lovely landscaped garden, and the extension offers a new entrance, bathroom, dressing room and a vaulted master bedroom

all helps. Some lenders will also look at your wider financial habits. Do you save regularly? Do you live within your means? Do you like a flutter? It all counts.

Then there's the deposit. Traditional mortgages usually require a deposit of at least 5% to 10% of the purchase price, whereas renovation mortgages expect a bit more – typically 15% to 25%, depending on the lender and project.

It's all quite complicated, so working with a mortgage adviser who specialises in renovation finance can be a huge help. They understand the complexities of renovation projects so are able to navigate you through them, helping to pull together the best application to secure the best deal.

Are there any downsides?

Renovation mortgages might unlock a project, but because they're more complex they come at a cost. Arrangement fees and interest rates are usually higher than for standard mortgage products, and then there's the added expense of a specialist mortgage broker to navigate the process and valuation fees to draw down funds. It all adds up, but it's worth remembering that the added expense is short lived; you're free to switch to a more competitive mortgage product at the end of the project.

Options if you already own the house

If you already own the property or secured a standard mortgage before realising the scale of work required to improve it, there are still a few options.

Firstly, it might be worth reviewing your financial plans. For those with substantial renovation, it could be worth redeeming the current mortgage and switching to a specialist mortgage product, better suited for the project. Some of these specialist products are designed to release funds based on the cost at each stage – ideal if you need the money upfront to keep the project on track.

It might be worth considering a traditional remortgage. If your property's value has gone up, you might be able to release equity to fund the renovation work. Alternatively, your current lender may offer a "further advance" which means letting you borrow more on top of your existing loan. This tends to be quicker and simpler than remortgaging, although not every lender will offer it for major works.

Another alternative might be a bridging loan. Bridging loans provide short-term financing until a longer-term solution is arranged. These might suit you if you're taking on a substantial renovation, and especially projects that render the house uninhabitable during works.

A successful renovation project requires much more than the ambition to create a wonderful home from the bones of a dilapidated house. It requires a good sense of what's realistic along with thorough financial planning and a flexible funding model that accommodates the inevitable renovation challenges.

For the right kind of project, renovation mortgages can be a lifeline for home improvers who are willing to put in the work to transform unloved buildings into beautiful, functional homes. And if you can combine the renovation work with high-quality sustainable upgrades, then green mortgage products can offer even more financial benefits and environmental rewards.

QUICK GUIDE GREEN MORTGAGES

If your renovation plans include energy efficiency upgrades, it's worth exploring green mortgage options. These are home loans that reward borrowers for investing in energy-saving measures by providing lower interest rates, cashback offers or more generous borrowing terms.

Green mortgages are usually linked to the property's Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating. If your home is rated A or B – or you're to bring it up to that level – you may be eligible. Qualifying improvements might include insulation upgrades, heating improvements, installing photovoltaic and solar panels, fitting triple glazed windows, or a range of other renewable energy technologies.

Most high street lenders offer green mortgages and more providers are now supporting eco renovations with flexible finance arrangements. Your lender will usually want to see either a retrofit plan or energy assessment, along with quotes and timeline for the upgrades. Some release funds in stages as the work is completed, just like with a renovation mortgage, making cashflow easy to manage.

Green mortgages support an approach that focuses on longer-term benefits of living in a more energy-efficient home that costs less to run. They also offer reduced mortgage rates or cashback deals that will save money, depending on the extent of improvement to your homes EPC rating.

A house with an array of green technologies typically commands a higher resale value. Running costs will be lower and you'll also be doing your bit for the environment, helping to reduce your home's carbon footprint by creating somewhere that's healthier to live in and more energy efficient.

Aside from the perk that an eco build is often more comfortable to live in, a major advantage of a green mortgage is that lenders will often lend more money. By considering the reduced running costs and a potential improvement to the home's value, lenders are able offer larger loans, provided you pass the affordability test.

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*A place is based on one device - for one or two people.

Ask the EXPERTS

Essential advice on your problems with building, budgeting, DIY & planning from the most experienced names in the self build industry

PLANNING
Martin Gaine runs planning consultancy Just Planning (www.just-planning.co.uk). A former case officer, he has experience on both sides of the planning divide and now specialises in helping homeowners win consent at appeal. He is the author of How to Get Planning Permission: An Insider's Secrets.

FINANCE
Simon Middleton is managing director of Protek Group. Since starting his career as a site engineer, he has been underwriting site insurance and structural warranty in the self build and construction sector for over 25 years.

SUSTAINABILITY
Nigel Griffiths specialises in sustainable construction and eco-renovation and was the author of the Haynes Eco House Manual. He advises UK government on retrofit programmes and inspects renewable heat installations on behalf of Ofgem. You can chat to Nigel at the Build It Live shows.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Mark Stevenson has worked as a construction professional for over 35 years and is a serial self builder. He runs project management consultancy Elsworth Projects and, as chair of NaCSBA, advocates for the interests of self builders and contributes to the success of the emerging custom build industry.

PERIOD PROPERTIES
Alan Tierney is a period property and conservation specialist. He ran an historic building consultancy, offering hands-on advice to heritage homeowners, but is now focused on renovating yet another property: Old Barnstaple House.

DESIGN
Opinder Liddar is a director at Lapd Architects (www.lapdarchitects.co.uk). The practice specialises in residential projects from extensions to new builds, making him the ideal person to answer all your home design questions.

VAT RECLAIMS
Kathy Tisdale runs Self Build VAT Reclaims (www.selfbuildvatreclaims.com), providing a professional VAT reclaim service which enables self builders and converters to focus on their project.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Is our £120,000 budget realistic?

We're looking to replace a mobile home with a three-bedroom house, but will be working to a limited budget of £120,000 for the construction and fit-out. What's the most cost-effective approach to realising our project?

If you're thinking of replacing a mobile home with a new house on a £120,000 budget, the first thing you really need to tie down is what kind of building you're actually planning to create. This is because it makes a huge difference to what standards you will be required to meet, and therefore ultimately, whether the budget you have set is feasible.

If the current mobile home you have is classed as a caravan, and what you're planning on building next is technically another temporary or mobile structure (even if it has three bedrooms), then it may fall under different standards – like BS 3632 (for residential park homes) or EN 1647 (for holiday homes). These standards are much less demanding than full Building Regulations, and the construction costs are lower. That might work for your budget, but only just.

If you're actually planning to build a permanent house that complies with Building Regulations, it's a very different story. Realistically, £120,000 won't stretch that far – especially if you are looking to create a three-bedroom house. You're likely looking at about £2,000-£2,400 per m^2 for a fully compliant build, which means your budget might cover only 50-60m^2 at best. That's tight, and probably not enough space for what you're hoping to achieve, even if you opt for a low-cost open panel timber frame, which is about the cheapest regulation compliant system you'll find on the market today.

ISTOCK.COM/GRALETTA

INSURANCE

What is a structural warranty?

We are planning on starting our new build project but have been told that we need a surveyor and structural warranty. What does this entail and why is it necessary?

A structural warranty is an insurance product that provides 10 years of cover against latent (or hidden) defects in the house's design, workmanship or materials should they subsequently cause major damage or defective weatherproofing, post completion. This type of warranty is particularly valuable for new build properties and large-scale renovations. The cover normally extends to include non-compliance with Building Regulations, which will help manage your exposure under the Defective Premises Act, offering you an additional layer of protection for the works.

In order to provide the cover, your chosen warranty company will need to check your designs and survey the works during the construction process. This is carried out by its technical auditor, whose fees will typically form a part of the structural warranty quotation. This type of inspection is essential to ensure what is being built is safe, of a suitable quality and compliant.

In addition to providing very important cover, the structural warranty is also one of the forms of evidence you can use to claim Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) exemption. A structural warranty should not be confused with a professional consultant's certificate, which does not afford the same level of protection, nor does it offer the same peace of mind to lenders or buyers.

ISTOCK.COM/JOH NLAMB

DESIGN

Can I do an eco retrofit while also maintaining accessibility?

We have a fairly large bungalow that's mostly suitable for wheelchair access, but it's still missing some key features, like a wet room. I'm interested in renovating to something along the lines of a Passivhaus, with solar panels and battery storage to make it as self-sufficient as possible, while also ensuring it remains fully accessible. Do you have any tips for designing a home that's both energy-efficient and accessible?

There appear to be two major factors that you want to address with your property. To me, it sounds as though the existing house is already generating some electricity through the solar panels and this system can easily be adapted to take into account the battery storage. You could look at improving your airtightness in the existing house by having a pressure test carried out to identify where it might be leaky and sealing those areas up. You could also consider improving the thermal quality of your home even more by insulating the floors, walls and roofs to bring you closer to Passivhaus standards.

In the process of undertaking these major works, your scheme could also address accessibility. I think the house could be remodelled to accommodate wider corridors, ideally 1.2m, and existing door openings widened to 1m to make it more wheelchair friendly. Also, your electrics could be updated so switches are between 0.45m to 1.2m from the floor level. Wet rooms can be also be installed in existing properties, but you may need to dig out for a slightly lower drain to accommodate a gully. For this room to be accessible, you need to make sure there is a clear 1.5m turning circle without any sanitary ware intruding onto the space for easy manoeuvrability.

VAT RECLAIMS

Can we claim back VAT on items that I have bought at auction?

We have bought several big price things at auction for which we have a VAT invoice and are eligible items. The VAT is split between hammer price and buyer's premium. I have so far only added the hammer price VAT to the application, but can I claim on the buyer's premium, too?

If you purchase materials to be used in the construction of your self build or conversion project at an auction, the buyer's premium is an additional fee, usually shown as a percentage, that the winning bidder must pay on top of the hammer price. This is paid to the auction house, not the seller, to cover administrative and other costs associated with the auction process, such as cataloguing, marketing and handling.

A builder's merchant or other suppliers include their costs in the price of the materials they are selling and supplying, and it is not shown as an additional separate cost on an invoice. So, it is on par with buying materials over the counter, where the listed price is what you pay.

The buyer's premium is subject to VAT as long as the auction house is VAT registered and it is eligible to be included in the HMRC VAT 431 reclaim scheme, meaning you can recover this cost as part of your overall VAT claim, provided all the other eligibility criteria are also met.

ISTOCK.COM/O2OCREATIVE

ANY QUESTIONS? Send all your self build, renovation and conversion questions to buildit@castlemedia.co.uk or visit www.self-build.co.uk/question
Please note all correspondence may be published in the magazine

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Get In Touch

For advice on funding options for your self or custom build project, speak to the experts at BuildStore by calling **0345 223 4647** or visit **www.buildstore.co.uk**

These products are chosen for illustrative purposes, and were available at the time of going to press.

KEY FOR TABLE: ★ BuildStore Exclusive Product | SB Self Build Mortgage | CB Custom Build Mortgage | LTV Loan to Value

Lender		Mortgage Type	Payment Schedule	Contact	LTV Land	LTV End Value	Interest Rate	1st Stage Payment
Bath BS	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	95%	85%	6.24%	DPP & Building Regs
Chorley BS	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	85%	80%	6.25%	DPP & Building Regs
Darlington BS	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	85%	80%	6.24%	DPP & Building Regs
Furness BS	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	80%	80%	5.84%	DPP & Building Regs
Furness BS (Green Build)	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	80%	80%	6.09%	DPP & Building Regs
Hinckley & Rugby BS	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	90%	80%	6.14%	DPP & Building Regs
Loughborough BS	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 233 4647	80%	80%	6.25%	DPP & Building Regs
Mansfield BS	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	85%	80%	5.99%	DPP & Building Regs
Newcastle BS	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	90%	90%	6.61%	DPP & Building Regs
Tipton & Coseley	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	85%	75%	6.08%	DPP & Building Regs
Vernon BS	★	SB & CB	Advance	0345 223 4647	85%	80%	6.49%	DPP & Building Regs
Bath BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	95%	85%	6.04%	Foundations
Chorley BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	50%	60%	5.80%	Foundations
Darlington BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	85%	80%	6.04%	Foundations
Furness BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	70%	70%	5.44%	Foundations
Furness BS (Green Build)	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	80%	80%	5.78%	Foundations
Hinckley & Rugby BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	90%	80%	6.04%	Foundations
Loughborough BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 233 4647	80%	80%	6.15%	Foundations
Mansfield BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	80%	80%	5.80%	Foundations
Newcastle BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	90%	90%	6.41%	Foundations
Stafford Railway BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	85%	80%	5.95%	Foundations
Tipton & Coseley BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	85%	75%	5.77%	Foundations
Vernon BS	★	SB & CB	Arrears	0345 223 4647	85%	80%	6.29%	Foundations
Beverley BS		SB	Arrears	01482 881 510	50%	80%	6.04%	Wall Plate
Earl Shilton BS		SB	Arrears	01455 844 422	75%	75%	6.34%	Flexible
Hanley BS		SB	Arrears	01782 255000	80%	80%	6.24%	Foundations
Melton Mowbray BS		SB	Arrears	01664 414 141	n/a	75%	6.00%	Foundations
Penrith BS		SB	Arrears	01768 863 675	80%	80%	5.99%	Foundations
Saffron BS		SB & CB	Arrears	0333 015 2970	80%	80%	6.24%	Flexible
Suffolk BS		SB	Arrears	0330 123 0723	70%	70%	6.05%	Foundations

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PlotBrowser.com is a 100% free-to-use plot and property finder, packed with 1,000s of home building opportunities. Here's a taster of the fantastic self build plots, renovation properties and conversions currently for sale near you

PlotBrowser.com is the latest addition to Build It's series of powerful project tools (**www.buildit.co.uk/tools**) designed to put you on the path to self build success.

Updated daily, this is your dedicated resource for finding genuine self build land and renovation opportunities. You'll find 1,000s of plots and properties to view nationwide, and each listing features the site details, photos, guide price and sellers' contact information – including details such as whether the plot or property is being sold at auction and, if so, when.

Crucially, we've done a big part of the plot-hunting job for you: all our plots already have either outline or full planning permission in place, so you won't have to waste your time looking at duds that might never gain consent to build.

What's more, we've sourced the planning reference for you, so that you can quickly and easily identify the current planning consent on the relevant local authority's website. This will arm you with a full understanding of the site's planning history and what's been permitted, so you can gauge whether the plot can support the kind of house you'd like to create.

The following pages are a sample of the plots, renovations and conversion projects available on **PlotBrowser.com** this month.

GOT A PLOT TO SELL?
Head to PlotBrowser.com and register as a seller to list your plot for free.

PlotBrowser from BuildIt magazine

START YOUR PLOT SEARCH

To find more plots with planning permission across the UK, and get free notifications of new opportunities based on your personal criteria, sign up today at **www.PlotBrowser.com**

TYPES OF BUILDING PLOT

New homes can be built on a range of sites and knowing about the opportunities can help you spot land with potential. Here are the key options:

BROWNFIELD SITES

This refers to previously developed land that is or was once occupied by a permanent structure. Government policy supports the provision of new housing in such locations and, on a practical level, services are likely to be in place.

DEMOLISH & REPLACE

A type of brownfield opportunity where you could knock down a building, such as an old bungalow, and construct a new home in its place. It's often more cost-effective than a renovation as VAT can be reclaimed on a new build project.

EDGE-OF-SETTLEMENT

Depending on the maps in the relevant council's Local Plan, this kind of site may or may not fall within existing built-up area boundaries. Generally, policies allow development within this zone, but control it very strictly outside. Any undeveloped land, known as greenfield, will typically only support housing to serve the needs of agriculture, replacement dwellings and some infill.

INFILL PLOTS

Many councils define this as a small gap between an otherwise built-up frontage or group of houses. Infilling is usually allowed within settlements' development boundaries, and sometimes outside of these. Gaining consent will be more difficult in zones such as conservation areas.

GARDENS

Contrary to the 'backland development' headlines of a few years ago, planners still allow schemes on garden plots, especially in places that are considered to be built-up. You may even be lucky enough to have a large space that could work as a viable site or know someone who is willing to negotiate a fair price.

SERVICED PLOTS

Land that's ready to build on, with utilities, highway access and potentially other infrastructure already in place, as well as at least outline planning consent. This route offers more certainty over early-stage costs.

ENGLAND

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

CAMBRIDGE

Barrinton

Plot with planning permission for the construction of a four-bedroom detached dwelling.

Guide price: £550,000

Planning: South Cambridgeshire District Council 25/00343/FUL

Contact: Cooke Curtis & Co 01223 508050 hello@cookecurtis.co.uk

Plot ID: 137207

MARCH

Whittlesey

Single plot of land with planning consent for a detached four-bedroom home and double garage.

Guide price: £150,000

Planning: Fenland District Council F/YR21/1235/voc

Contact: William H Brown 01354 654545 march@williamhbrown.co.uk

Plot ID: 137192

CHESHIRE

BARNSTON

Private street

Land with consent for a four-bedroom detached property.

Guide price: £275,000

Planning: Wirral Council APP/24/01640

Contact: Private seller paul@cofactormarketing.co.uk

Plot ID: 137317

PRESTBURY

Springfield

Plot of land with planning permission granted for two detached houses.

Guide price: £895,000

Planning: Cheshire East Council 23/1056M

Contact: Holmes Naden 01625 828254 sales@holmesnaden.com

Plot ID: 137223

CORNWALL

HELSTON

Mawgan Cross

Plot with planning permission in place for the erection of a three-bedroom detached cottage.

Guide price: £175,000

Planning: Cornwall Council PA24/09498, PA24/01629

Contact: Martin & Co 01872 225354 truro@martinco.com

Plot ID: 137292

PRAA SANDS

Pengersick Croft

Plot of land with planning permission for a four-bedroom detached home.

Guide price: £195,000

Planning: Cornwall Council PA22/01396

Contact: Christophers Estate Agents 01326 565566 property@christophers.uk.com

Plot ID: 137200

COUNTY DURHAM

BLACKHALL ROCKS

Station Road

Plot of land with planning permission for the demolition of the existing dwellings and construction of three detached properties.

Guide price: £175,000

Planning: Durham County Council DM/23/03698/FPA

Contact: Vickers & Barrass 01325 728084 darlington@vickersandbarrass.co.uk

Plot ID: 137293

CUMBRIA

MARYPORT

Wigton Road

Plot of land with planning permission for three detached houses.

Guide price: £100,000

Planning: Allerdale Borough Council FUL/2023/0145

Contact: P F KLand Agency 01768 866611 landagency@pfk.co.uk

Plot ID: 137251

DERBYSHIRE

CLOWNE

Creswell Road

Plot comprising two bungalows with planning permission for the construction of four additional detached bungalows.

Guide price: £625,000

Planning: Bolsover District Council 24/00224/out

Contact: W T Parkers 01246 232156 chesterfield@wtparker.com

Plot ID: 137191

MIDWAY

Burton Road

Plot of land with planning permission for the construction of a pair of detached four-bedroom dwellings.

Guide price: £205,000

Planning: South Derbyshire District Council DMPA/2022/1382

Contact: Newton Fallowell 01283 564657 burton@newtonfallowell.co.uk

Plot ID: 137295

NEW MILLS

High Hill Road

A plot of land with planning permission in place for the erection of two bespoke detached houses.

Guide price: £165,000

Planning: High Peak Borough Council HPK/2024/0319

Contact: Sutherland Reay 01663 744866 newmills@sutherlandreay.com

Plot ID: 137315

DEVON

BARNSTAPLE

Marwood

Land with planning consent for the demolition of the existing barn and construction of a detached dwelling.

Guide price: £250,000

Planning: North Devon Council 76705

Contact: Stags 01271 322833 barnstaple@stags.co.uk

Plot ID: 137189

BITEFORD, WOOLSERY

New Barn

DEVON

BEAWORTHY

Back Lane

Rural plot with far-reaching views and planning permission granted for a detached three-bedroom house.

Guide price: £175,000

Planning: Torridge District Council 1/0492/2019/ FUL

Contact: Mansbridge & Balment 01837 52371 okehampton@mansbridgebalment.co.uk

Plot ID: 137282

A barn with permission to demolish and replace with a new build, set in approx 17 acres of land.
Guide price: £500,000
Planning: Torridge District Council 1/1031/2024/FUL
Contact: Strutt and Parker 01392 215631 exeter@struttandparker.com
Plot ID: 137310

COMBE MARTIN
Western Gardens
Land with planning consent for the demolition of the existing dwelling and the construction of a four-bedroom detached property.
Guide price: £250,000
Planning: North Devon Council 77617
Contact: Phillips Smith & Dunn 01271 327878 michael@phillipsland.com
Plot ID: 137208

HATHERLEIGH
Park Road
Plot of land with planning permission for the construction of a three- to four-bedroom detached house.
Guide price: £160,000
Planning: West Devon Borough Council 0629/20/ARM
Contact: Bond Oxborough Phillips 01837 500600 okehampton@bopproperty.com
Plot ID: 137243

IVYBRIDGE
Filham Moor Lane
Plot of land with planning permission in principle for the construction of two detached homes.
Guide price: £200,000
Planning: South Hams District Council 1123/23/PIP
Contact: Greenslade Taylor Hunt 01769 574500 residential.southmolton@gth.net
Plot ID: 137219

DORSET

DORCHESTER
North Street
Site with outline planning permission granted for the construction of a pair of four-bedroom detached homes. The plot is set in an elevated position, enjoying far-reaching rural views.
Guide price: £425,000
Planning: West Dorset District Council P/OUT/2022/03731
Contact: Private seller michele749@hotmail.com
Plot ID: 137260

GILLINGHAM
Colesbrook Farm
A large edge-of-town plot with planning permission for a single home of about 232m^2 with great views.
Guide price: £375,000
Planning: North Dorset District Council P/VOC/2021/01172
Contact: Symonds & Sampson LLP 01258 473766 gwb@symondsandsampson.co.uk
Plot ID: 137306

HARMANS CROSS
Valley Road
Plot of land with planning permission granted for the demolition of the site's existing dwellings and the erectrion of a two-bedroom detached bungalow.
Guide price: £80,000
Planning: Purbeck District Council p/ful/2022/07788
Contact: Corbens 01929 422284 property@corbens.co.uk
Plot ID: 137230

EAST SUSSEX

BROAD OAK
Chitcombe Road
Plot of land with planning permission for the renovation of the existing three-bedroom house and the construction of two detached homes.
Guide price: £1,150,000
Planning: Rother District Council RR/2024/625/P
Contact: Rush Witt & Wilson 01797 253555 northiam@rushwittwilson.co.uk
Plot ID: 137278

MARESFIELD
The Drive
A half an acre plot with consent for a barn-style five-bedroom home with views over the Ashdown Forest. Custom build packages are available.
Guide price: £595,000
Planning: Wealden District Council WD/2023/2486/F
Contact: Private seller 07748 056177 wg@abode.homes
Plot ID: 137234

EAST YORKSHIRE

ROOS
Meadow Croft
Plot with planning permission for a detached three-bedroom dwelling.
Guide price: £130,000
Planning: East Riding of Yorkshire Council 21/00342/plf
Contact: Beercocks 01482 320000 hull@beercocks.com
Plot ID: 137324

ESSEX

CHADWELL HEATH
Danbury Close
Single plot with planning permission to demolish the existing dwellings and erect a two-bedroom house.
Guide price: £65,000
Planning: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 25/00124/full
Contact: Auction House London 020 7625 9007 info@auctionhouselondon.co.uk
Plot ID: 137255

CLACTON-ON-SEA
St Mary's Road
Plot of land with planning permission for the construction of a three-bedroom detached dwelling.
Guide price: £65,000
Planning: Tendring District Council 25/00095/FUL
Contact: Blake & Thickbroom 01255 688788 enquiries@blake-thickbroom.co.uk
Plot ID: 137190

DEBDEN
Church Lane
Land with planning permission granted for the construction of a four- to five-bedroom detached property.
Guide price: £425,000
Planning: Uttlesford District Council UTT/23/0637/FUL
Contact: Cheffins 01223 214214 cambridge.residential@cheffins.co.uk
Plot ID: 137236

WETHERSFIELD
Rotten End
A single-storey barn set in over an acre with full consent for conversion into a three-bedroom home.
Guide price: £375,000
Planning: Braintree District Council 22/00395/ful
Contact: William H Brown 01376 320018 braintree@williamhbrown.co.uk
Plot ID: 137254

WHAT MAKES A GOOD PLOT?

The perfect piece of land would be in a pleasant area, affordable and level, with easy access, good ground conditions and no planning issues or obstructions. The issue, of course, is that plot may not exist. Even the best sites require some compromise, so it's crucial to properly assess contenders to get as close as possible to your goals.

All the plots in our listings come with planning permission: either outline (a loose affirmation the site can be developed) or full (consent for a particular design). Beware of any site without current approval. Land is worth considerably more once consent has been granted, so if the deal looks too good to be true, it probably is.

Once you've spotted an opportunity, consider whether the type of house you want can be comfortably accommodated on the plot, and if the existing consent allows for it or could be amended to suit. If it's a yes to both, then the site is worth a bit more research.

Check for issues on the plot that could increase construction costs, make it difficult to get the right design for your needs, or affect the viability of a project. Some of the most notorious budget-busters include steep slopes, difficult access to services, or obstacles like overhead cables. Most issues are not insurmountable and, with good design, some can even be turned to your advantage.

From a planning perspective, check how long is left on the consent. If it is less than six months and you will need to redesign the house to suit your needs or sort out any planning conditions, this could be problematic.

If early investigations seem positive, then you can move on to a more in-depth appraisal of how suitable the site is. Consider access, ground conditions, drainage and legal matters. If you are unsure, seek professional advice. This might mean speaking to your local council. Our useful online resource **www.self-build.co.uk/plot-checklist** can help bring structure to this part of the assessment process.

HEREFORDSHIRE

HEREFORD
Llancloudy
A rural plot with full consent for a split-level, contemporary three-bedroom home, set in an elevated position with countryside views.
Guide price: £300,000
Planning: Herefordshire Council P203465/F
Contact: Archer & Co 01989 768484 ross@archerandco.com
Plot ID: 137299

GREAT BARDFIELD
Bardfield Centre
Plot of land with planning consent for the conversion of an existing barn into a four-bedroom detached house.
Guide price: £1,300,000
Planning: Braintree District Council 24/02436/FUL, 24/02437/LBC
Contact: Balgores 01245 492424 sales@balgoreschelmsford.com
Plot ID: 137269

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

CHELTENHAM
Idsall Drive
Land with planning permission for the construction of a five-bedroom detached residential dwelling.
Guide price: £650,000
Planning: Cheltenham Borough Council 24/01353/FUL
Contact: Move Sales & Lettings 01242 257333 cheltenham@move.uk.net
Plot ID: 137318

TUTSHILL
Sedbury Lane
Building plot with planning consent for the construction of a detached, five-bedroom home and a six-bedroom detached dwelling.
Guide price: £400,000
Planning: Forest of Dean District Council P1051/18/OUT
Contact: Powells 01600 714140 enquiries@powellsrural.co.uk
Plot ID: 137211

HAMPSHIRE

SILCHESTER
Impstone Lodge, Soke Road
Plot of 1.5 acres, including one acre of woods, with a small detached cottage. Planning consent is in process for a three- to four-bedroom detached extension/renovation.
Guide price: £660,000
Planning: Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council Refer to Agent
Contact: Private seller 07760 295275 rex.haigh@gmail.com
Plot ID: 137215

SWANMORE
Hillcross Rise, Droxford Road
Semi-rural building plot with full planning permission in place for the construction of a four-bedroom chalet-style bungalow, designed by a local architect.
Guide price: £360,000
Planning: South Downs National Park SDNP/19/03659/FUL
Contact: Private seller 07802 667355 jonathan@thehouses1.plus.com
Plot ID: 137238

KENT

HAMSTREET
Marsh Road
Land with planning consent for the construction of two five-bedroom and one four-bedroom detached home, along with four, three-bedroom semi-detached dwellings.
Guide price: £1,500,000
Planning: Ashford Borough Council 22/00792/as
Contact: Hunters 01580 763278 tenterden@hunters.com
Plot ID: 137285

WEST KINGSDOWN
London Road
Single building plot with full planning permission in place for the erection of a four-bedroom detached house measuring around 212m^2.
Guide price: £450,000
Planning: Sevenoaks District Council 23/02559/FUL
Contact: Private seller 07836 616111 stevecrone@hotmail.co.uk
Plot ID: 137286

LANCASHIRE

BURNLEY
Reedley Drive
Plot with planning permission for the conversion of a two-bedroom bungalow into a six-bedroom house.
Guide price: £475,000
Planning: Pendle Borough Council 22/0404/hho
Contact: Jon Simon 01282 427445 info@jonsimon.co.uk
Plot ID: 137332

LINCOLNSHIRE

BARDNEY
Wragby Road
Single plot with planning permission for the construction of a four- to five-bedroom detached property.
Guide price: £100,000
Planning: West Lindsey District Council Refer to Agent
Contact: Purple Bricks 0800 810 8008 info@purplebricks.com
Plot ID: 137201

TETNEY
Humberstone Road
Land with planning permission for the construction of a detached dwelling.
Guide price: £250,000
Planning: East Lindsey District Council N/178/00251/23
Contact: Lovelle Estate Agency 01472 251918 grimsby@lovelle-property.co.uk
Plot ID: 137314

MIDDLESEX

HAMPTON
51a Oldfield Road
Site comprising an old workshop and garden with planning permission in principle for a replacement two-bedroom detached cottage.
Guide price: £300,000-£450,000
Planning: London Borough of Richmond upon Thames 24/3187/PIP
Contact: Private seller 07796 440631 andytheplanner@hotmail.com
Plot ID: 137268

NORFOLK

DISS
The Street
A single plot with planning permission granted for the construction of a detached four-bedroom house.
Guide price: £120,000
Planning: Breckland District Council 3PL/2021/1267/D
Contact: Auction House East Anglia 01603 505100 norwich@auctionhouse.co.uk
Plot ID: 137289

HEPWORTH
Bury Road
Single plot with planning permission for the construction of a three-bedroom detached bungalow.
Guide price: £245,000
Planning: West Suffolk Council DC/24/0475/ful
Contact: Starkings & Watson 01379 450950 headoffice@starkingsandwatson.co.uk
Plot ID: 137244

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

EDWINSTOWE
Rufford Road
Land with outline planning permission for up to four residential dwellings.
Guide price: £650,000
Planning: Newark and Sherwood District Council 22/02417/out
Contact: Buckley Brown Estate Agents 01623 633633 mansfield@buckleybrown.co.uk
Plot ID: 137320

WORKSOP
Lindrick Road
Single plot with planning permission for the construction of a detached two-bedroom bungalow.
Guide price: £150,000
Planning: Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council RB2024/0462
Contact: Reeds Rains 01909 566031 dinnington@reedsrains.co.uk
Plot ID: 137196

SHROPSHIRE

JACKFIELD
Stone Lee
Plot of land with planning permission for the construction of a pair of three-bedroom semi-detached dwellings, a detached three-bedroom home and three, four-bedroom detached homes.
Guide price: £1,000,000
Planning: Shropshire Council 22/02056/ful
Contact: Mannleys 01952 245064 info@mannleysproperty.co.uk
Plot ID: 137323

MARKET DRAYTON
Shropshire Street
Plot of land with planning permission in place for the construction of a three-bedroom detached property.
Guide price: £75,000
Planning: Shropshire Council 24/03265/ful
Contact: James du Pavey 01785 851886 eccleshall@jamesdupavey.co.uk
Plot ID: 137199

SOMERSET

EAST LAMBROOK
Hawthorn Hill
A single building plot with planning permission for a detached property.
Guide price: £195,000
Planning: Somerset Council South Somerset area 23/00564/fu
Contact: Symonds & Sampson 01935 423526 shennessey@symondsandsampson.co.uk
Plot ID: 137231

PROMOTED PLOT

LUXURY SELF BUILD OPPORTUNITY

1

2

DEVELOPMENT D'Urton Rise

LOCATION Broughton, Lancashire, PR3 5LF

GUIDE PRICES Approximately £600,000-£800,000 per plot

PRODUCT RANGE Customisable five-bedroom detached houses

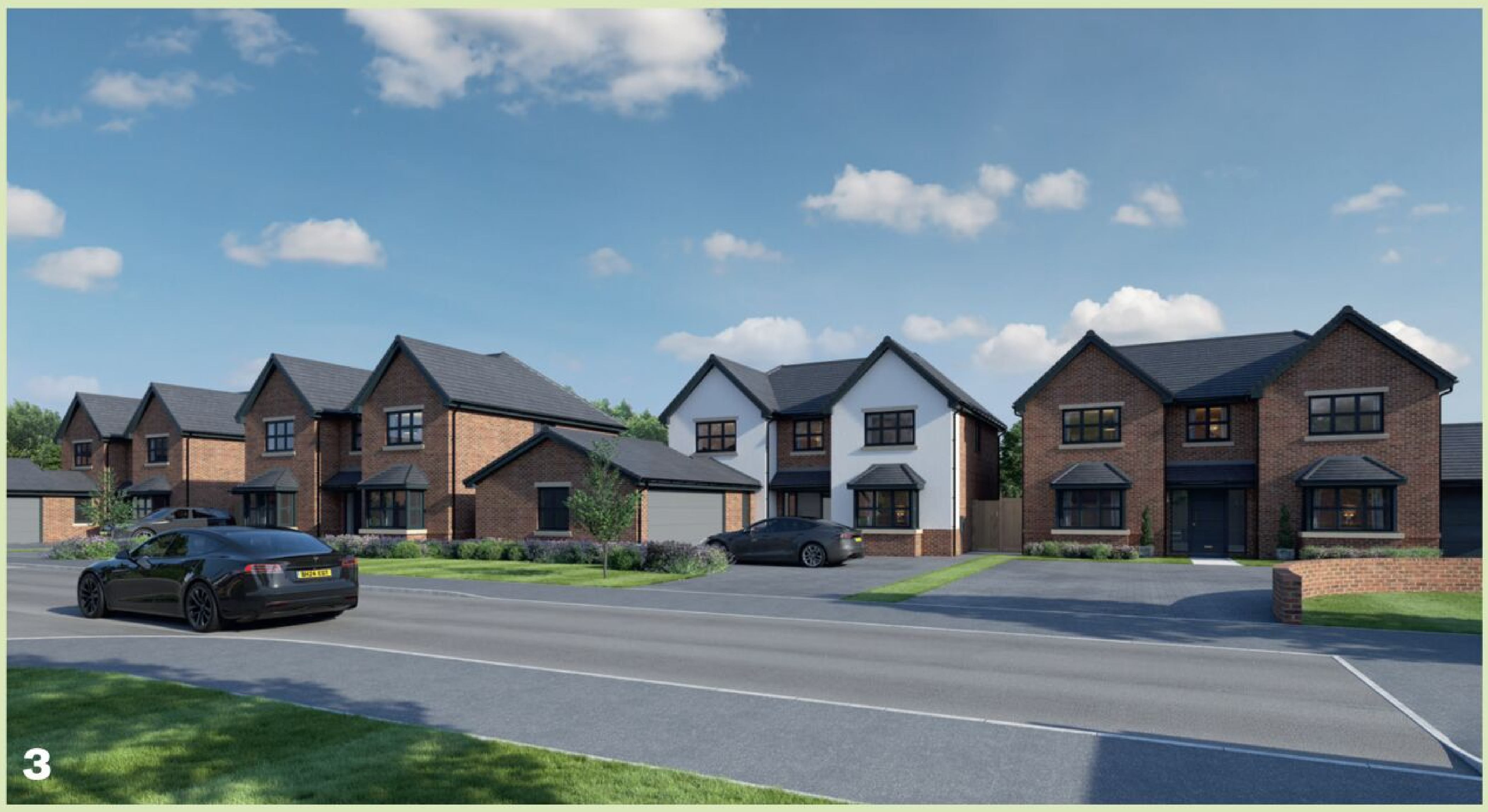
CONTACT 01614 705910 (Option 2)
info@ascot-homes.co.uk

With stunning views over to the Trough of Bowland, D'Urton Rise in Broughton offers the opportunity to create your own bespoke five-bed house, designed by Ascot Homes.

A luxurious custom build development of beautifully-designed homes, D'Urton Rise is in a highly sought-after location on the northern fringes of Preston, with stunning views across some of Lancashire's most beautiful countryside.

Nestled in a select location, off the beaten track via its own private tree-lined entrance drive, the development mixes traditional architecture with contemporary interiors. Each plot features its own large rear garden overlooking open countryside towards the Beacon Fell Country Park and the Bowland Fells. Access roads and sewerage are already in place, ensuring a smooth building project.

Ascot Homes builds a select range of premium quality homes. At D'Urton Rise, we can offer you two great purchasing options: ready-built and ready to move into; or bespoke built, where the interior specification is completely tailored to you.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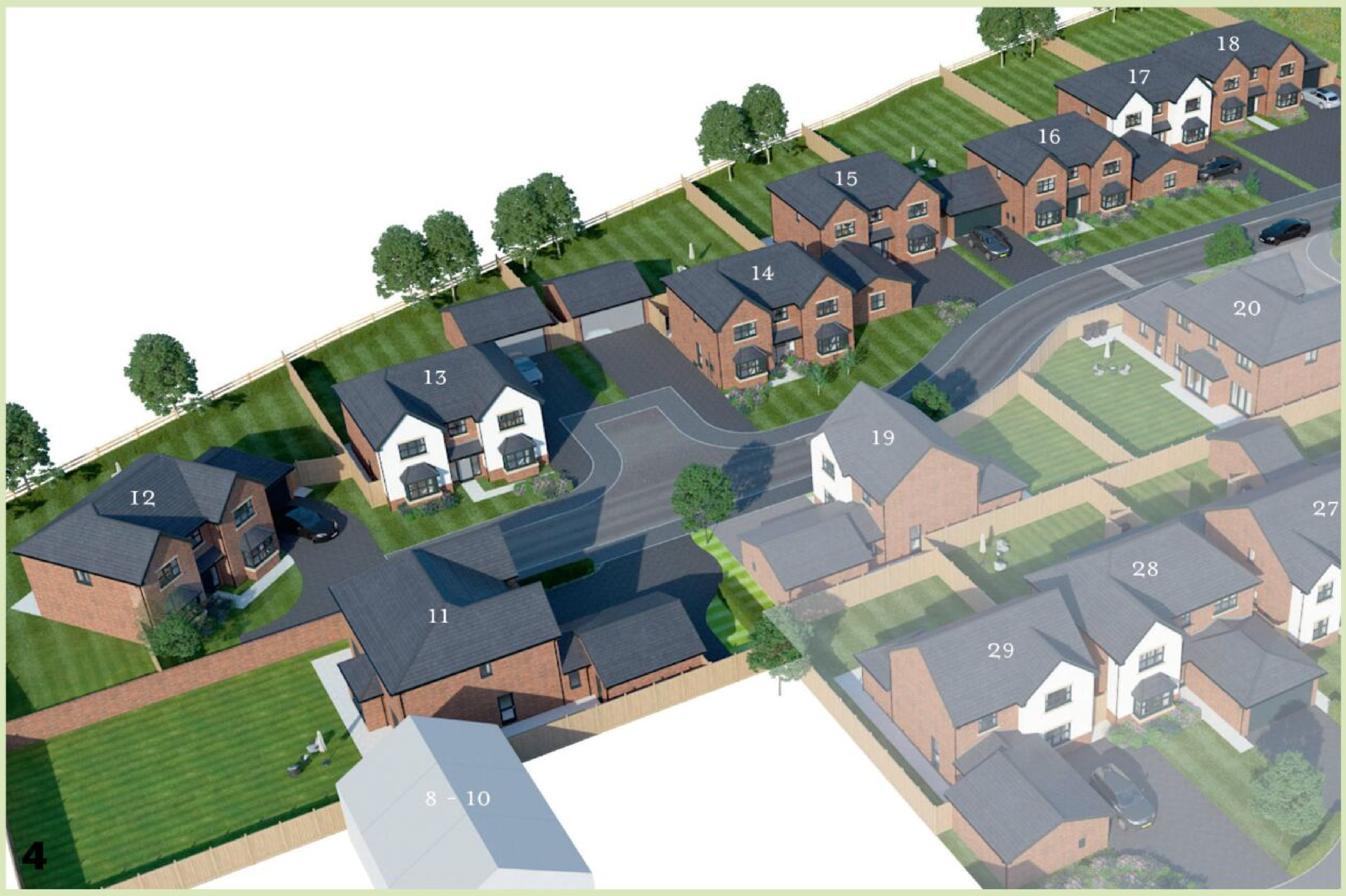
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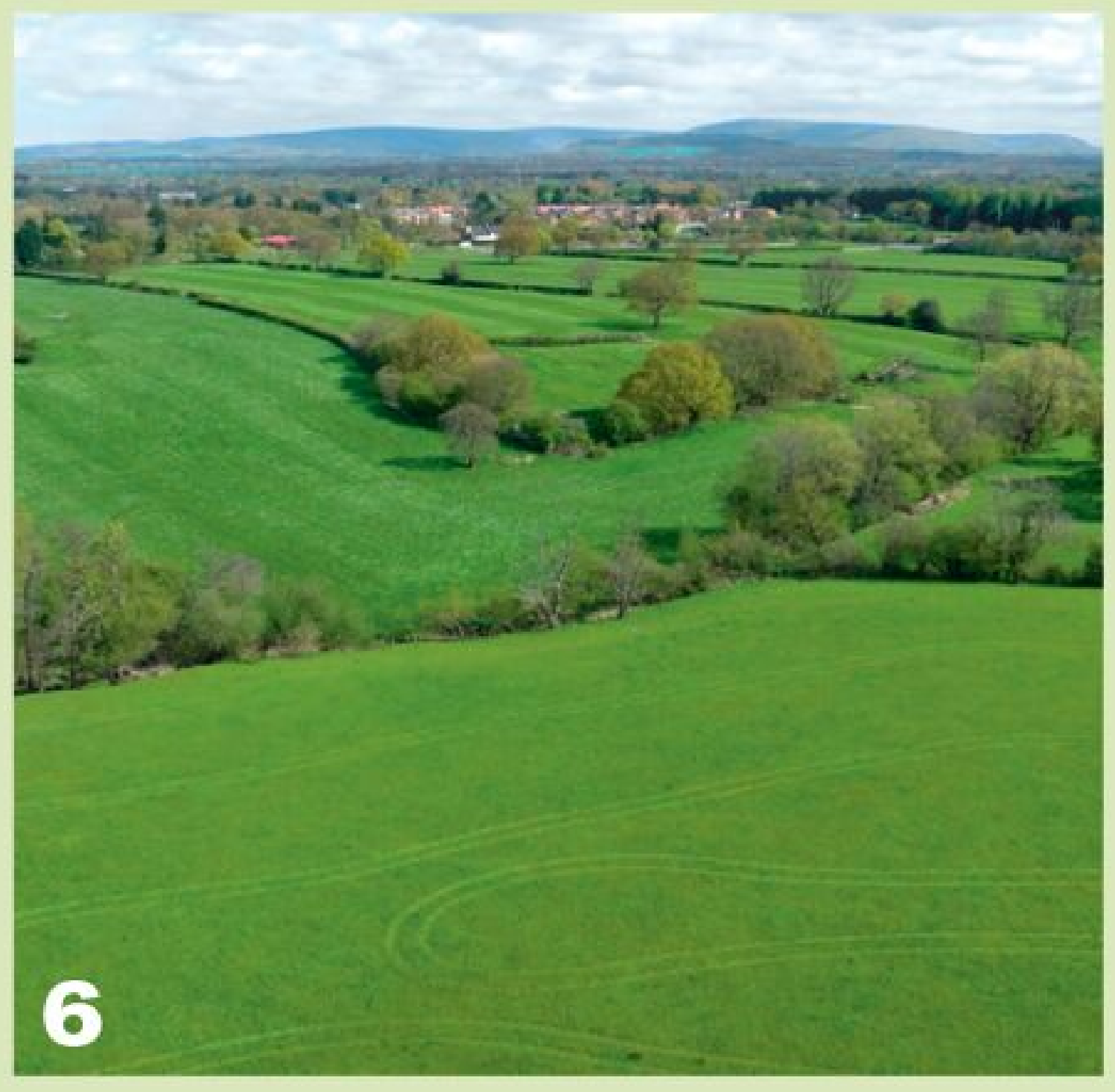
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1 Each scheme features high-quality German kitchens

2 Tiles and sanitaryware are included in the spec

3, 4 & 5 The development is made up of a collection of charming, homes with spacious gardens

6 The site has fantastic views over the Bowland Fells

For further details and to check out the available plots in more detail, visit www.ascot-homes.co.uk

SUFFOLK

MIDDLETON

Valley Farm Barn

A traditional timber frame Suffolk barn with rural views. Full planning permission and listed building consent in place for conversion into a five-bedroom property.
Guide price: £300,000
Planning: East Suffolk Council DC/22/1070/FUL
Contact: Jackson-Stops Estate Agents 01473 218218 ipswich@jackson-stops.co.uk
Plot ID: 137273

HINTON BLEWETT

Lower Road

Site with planning consent for the construction of five detached homes.
Guide price: £750,000
Planning: Bath and North East Somerset Council 22/04109/ful
Contact: Hollis Morgan 0117 973 6565 post@hollismorgan.co.uk
Plot ID: 137197

STAFFORDSHIRE

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME

Eleanor Crescent

Plot of land with outline planning permission for the erection of a four-bedroom detached house.
Guide price: £160,000
Planning: Newcastle-Under-Lyme District Council 24/00674/out
Contact: Heywoods 01782 617343 u2us@heywoodsproperty.co.uk
Plot ID: 137237

WHITMORE

Birch Tree Lane

Plot of land with planning permission for a contemporary detached home.
Guide price: £275,000
Planning: Newcastle-Under-Lyme District Council 22/01089/ful
Contact: Tinsley Garner 01785 811800 andrew@tgprop.co.uk
Plot ID: 137256

SUFFOLK

ERWARTON

Queens Head

A three-storey grade II listed former pub, set in around 0.33 acres with views across the Suffolk and Essex coast. Planning permission has been granted to convert the extensive ground floor into additional living accommodation, totalling 352m^2.
Guide price: £700,000
Planning: Babergh District Council Refer to Agent
Contact: Private seller earl_seabeds_3k@icloud.com
Plot ID: 137321

HOLBROOK, IPSWICH

Grove Farm Barn

Grove Farm Barn is a substantial steel framed agricultural building, located on the edge of the village with rural views. Class Q consent gas been granted for its conversion into a modern home, set in 1.3 acres.
Guide price: £400,000
Planning: Babergh District Council DC/24/00454
Contact: Jackson-Stops Estate Agents 01473 218218 ipswich@jackson-stops.co.uk
Plot ID: 137274

NEWMARKET

St John's Avenue

Land with planning consent for a detached two-bedroom property.
Guide price: £60,000
Planning: East Cambridgeshire District Council 22/00585/FUL
Contact: Auction House East Anglia 01603 505100 norwich@auctionhouse.co.uk
Plot ID: 137298

SURREY

TADWORTH

Vernon Walk

Land with planning permission for the construction of a detached dwelling.
Guide price: £500,000
Planning: Reigate and Banstead Borough Council 24/00428/F
Contact: Christopher St James 020 8296 1270 info@csj.eu.com
Plot ID: 137218

WARWICKSHIRE

EDGBASTON

Westfield Road

Plot of land with planning permission for the construction of a seven-bedroom detached property with a garage and swimming pool.
Guide price: £1,795,000
Planning: Birmingham City Council 2018/02813/PA
Contact: Robert Powell & Co 0121 454 6930 sales@robertpowell.co.uk
Plot ID: 137205

MERIDEN

The Street

Plot with planning consent granted for the conversion of a Dutch barn into a six-bedroom house.
Guide price: £450,000
Planning: Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council PL/2023/00106/PPFL
Contact: Private seller 01676 521107 jon.twigg@aol.com
Plot ID: 137281

WEST SUSSEX

WOODMANCOTE

Land for sale

Single building plot with planning permission for the construction of a modern detached property.
Guide price: £2,000,000
Planning: Chichester District Council 23/02471/FUL
Contact: The Land Agency 0800 783 2294 ed@land4property.com
Plot ID: 137290

WEST YORKSHIRE

GLEDHOLT

Heaton Park Villas

Land with planning consent for the erection of a four-bedroom house.
Guide price: £250,000
Planning: Kirklees Council Refer to Agent
Contact: Fine & Country 01484 550620 huddersfield@fineandcountry.com
Plot ID: 137242

STOCKSBRIDGE

Manchester Road

Plot of land with planning permission for a three-bedroom detached home.
Guide price: £95,000
Planning: Sheffield City Council 24/00148/FUL
Contact: Butcher Residential 01226 767766 penistone@butcherez.co.uk
Plot ID: 137232

WILTSHIRE

BRADFORD-ON-AVON

Lower South Wraxall

Building plot with planning permission granted for the construction of a three- to five-bedroom property.
Guide price: £795,000
Planning: Wiltshire Council 20/04326/FUL
Contact: Knight Frank LLP 01225 325999 bath@knightfrank.com
Plot ID: 137229

HEYWOOD, WESTBURY

Church Road

Land with planning permission for the conversion of an existing barn into a three-bedroom detached dwelling.
Guide price: £350,000
Planning: Wiltshire Council PL/2024/02830
Contact: Woolley & Wallis 01672 515252 marlborough@w-w.co.uk
Plot ID: 137262

LYNEHAM

Preston Lane

Single plot with consent for a pair of three-bedroom dwellings.
Guide price: £95,000
Planning: Wiltshire Council Pl/2025/00470
Contact: Hollis Morgan 0117 973 6565 post@hollismorgan.co.uk
Plot ID: 137228

WEST YORKSHIRE

HALIFAX

Jerwood Hill Road

A 0.15-acre plot with planning consent for a pair of three-bedroom, detached dormer bungalows.
Guide price: £200,000
Planning: Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council 24/00058/FUL
Contact: Charnock Bates 01422 380100 info@charnockbates.com
Plot ID: 137279

ARGYLL AND BUTE

TOBERMORY
Victoria Street
A plot of around 0.25 acres with views over Tobermory Bay. Full planning permission is granted for a single detached property.
Guide price: over £100,000
Planning: Argyll and Bute Council 23/01957/PP
Contact: Peter Murphy & Co Estate Agents 01397 528447 sales@petermurphyestateagents.com
Plot ID: 137294

SCOTLAND

ABERDEENSHIRE

FORDOUN, LAURENCEKIRK
16 Old Aberdeen Road
Plot 2 extends to extends to approx $910m^2$ and comes with full planning permission for a three-bedroom detached bungalow with double garage, driveway parking and ample space for landscaped gardens.
Guide price: £80,000
Planning: Aberdeenshire Council APP/2023/1695
Contact: McEwan Fraser Legal 0131 524 9797 mandy.taylor@mcewanfraserlegal.co.uk
Plot ID: 137322

MACDUFF
Station Brae
Single plot with planning permission granted for the construction of a three-bedroom detached dwelling.
Guide price: £110,000
Planning: Aberdeenshire Council APP/2023/1831
Contact: Low & Partners 01779 400352 enquiries@lowandpartners.co.uk
Plot ID: 137296

FIFE

CUPAR
Crossgate
Land with planning consent for a three-bedroom detached house.
Guide price: £70,000
Planning: Fife Council 24/03104/FULL
Contact: Thorntons 01334 656564 cuparea@thorntons-law.co.uk
Plot ID: 137210

PEAT INN
Wester Radernie Steading
Plot with consent for the demolition of the existing ruins and the erection of two detached homes.
Guide price: £195,000
Planning: Fife Council 21/03857/FULL
Contact: Strutt & Parker 0131 226 2500 natalie.simpson@struttandparker.com
Plot ID: 137261

HIGHLAND

ARGDAY
Burnside Fields Migdale, Bonar Bridge
A two-acre rural plot with planning permission in principle for a 1.5-storey dwelling, offering potential for a variety of development projects.
Price band: £100,000-£150,000
Planning: Highland Council 22/03870/PIP
Contact: McEwan Fraser Legal 0131 524 9797 mandy.taylor@mcewanfraserlegal.co.uk
Plot ID: 137203

DRUMNADROCHIT
West of Eastwood, Balnain
A 3.3-acre building plot set amidst the breathtaking landscape of Glen Urquhart. Planning permission has been granted for the construction of a two-storey property.
Guide price: £130,000
Planning: Highland Council 24/01837/FUL
Contact: McEwan Fraser Legal 0131 524 9797 mandy.taylor@mcewanfraserlegal.co.uk
Plot ID: 137266

FORTROSE
Feddon Hill
Plot of land with planning permission in principle for the construction of a single detached house and garage.
Guide price: £90,000
Planning: Highland Council 23/03035/pip
Contact: Tailor Made Moves Ltd 01463 233218 info@tailormademoves.co.uk
Plot ID: 137240

PERTH AND KINROSS

DRUM
Muirs
Plot with planning consent for the construction of two detached homes.
Guide price: £250,000
Planning: Perth and Kinross Council 24/01094/ipl
Contact: Andersons LLP 01577 862405 property@andersons-kinross.co.uk
Plot ID: 137284

WALES

CARMARTHENSHIRE

GARNANT
Penyrallt
Land with planning permission granted for the construction of a pair of semi-detached properties.
Guide price: £110,00
Planning: Carmarthenshire County Council PL/02634
Contact: Anna Ashton Estate Agents 01269 839392 ammanford@annaashton.wales
Plot ID: 137257

LLANYBYDDER
Bee Hive, TyMawr
A pair of cottages, one of which is grade II listed, set on a 48m corner plot overlooking pasture land and hills. The main two-storey cottage has full planning consent for a double-storey extension, while Heritage Wales has confirmed a single-storey extension to the second cottage would be looked upon favourably.
Guide price: £125,000
Planning: Carmarthenshire County Council PL/03524
Contact: Private seller 07908 154558 phil.linda2002@gmail.com
Plot ID: 137188

CEREDIGION

BONCATH
Blaenffos
Plot of land with planning permission for the construction of a pair of three-bedroom semi-detached dwellings.
Guide price: £120,000
Planning: Pembrokeshire County Council 24/0571/pa
Contact: J J Morris 01239 612343 cardigan@jjmorris.com
Plot ID: 137246

PEMBROKESHIRE

SAUNDERSFOOT
The Ridgeway
Plot with outline planning permission granted for two detached properties.
Guide price: £195,000
Planning: Pembrokeshire Coast National Park NP/22/0476/OUT
Contact: West Wales Properties 01834 845584 tenby@westwalesproperties.co.uk
Plot ID: 137247

TENBY
Jameson
Plot with planning permission for a four- to five-bedroom detached home.
Guide price: £150,000
Planning: Pembrokeshire Coast National Park NP/18/0610/FUL
Contact: West Wales Properties 01834 84 584 tenby@westwalesproperties.co.uk
Plot ID: 137248

ASK AN EXPERT AT BUILD IT LIVE

Want more plot finding advice? Join us at Build It Live for our annual exhibitions in Bicester, Exeter and Kent.

Talk to the experts
Our planning experts Julia Riddle and Martin Gaine will be on hand all weekend to answer your questions and help make that first stage of your project a little easier to digest.

Attend our seminar: How to find land and getting planning permission
Whether it's a new build, renovation or extension, creating your dream home starts with obtaining planning consent. Our plot and planning specialist guides you through the essential elements, including submitting your application, and offers invaluable advice on finding the right plot of land.

Visit the LAND ZONE brought to you by PlotBrowser.com
Check out our gallery of current available plots in the region, plus the latest serviced plot projects across the UK. Discover everything you need to know about finding the right plot for your project.

Find out more and book your tickets: **www.builditlive.co.uk**

Check out the 2024 Build It Award Winners

Build It AWARDS 2024

In association with BUILDSTORE FOR SMART HOMEBUILDERS

The Build It Awards, in association with BuildStore, is the UK's premier celebration of the very best products, services, projects and innovations for self builders and renovators. Every year, our panel of industry experts put all of their knowledge and experience into scrutinising hundreds of high-quality entries, with the goal of helping you to identify the very best options out there for creating your dream home.

From inspiring projects to innovative products, take a look at the winners and shortlist to help you specify the right materials and appoint the right partners to suit your individual project.

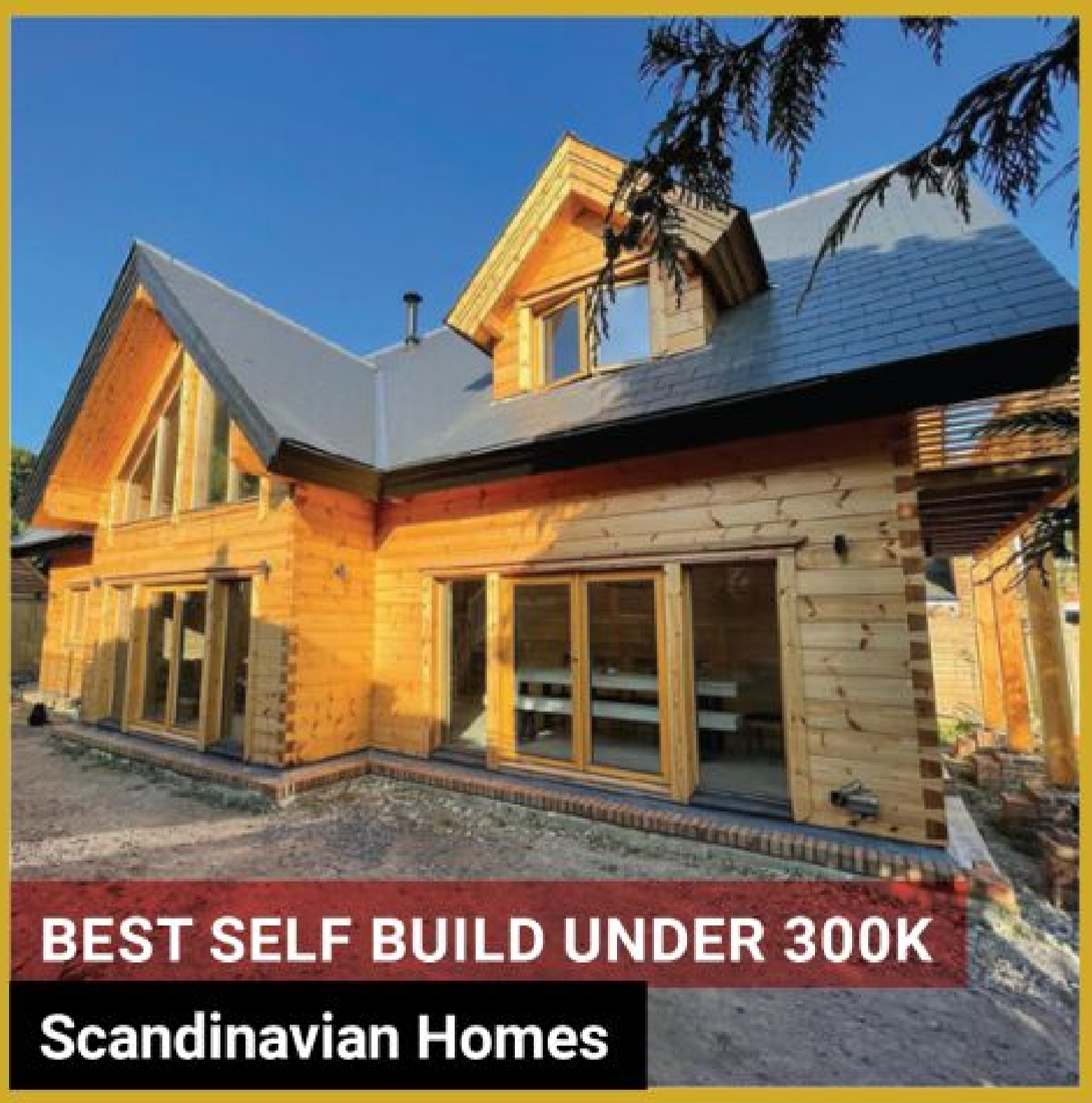
From architects to glazing, here are a few of our well-deserved winners...

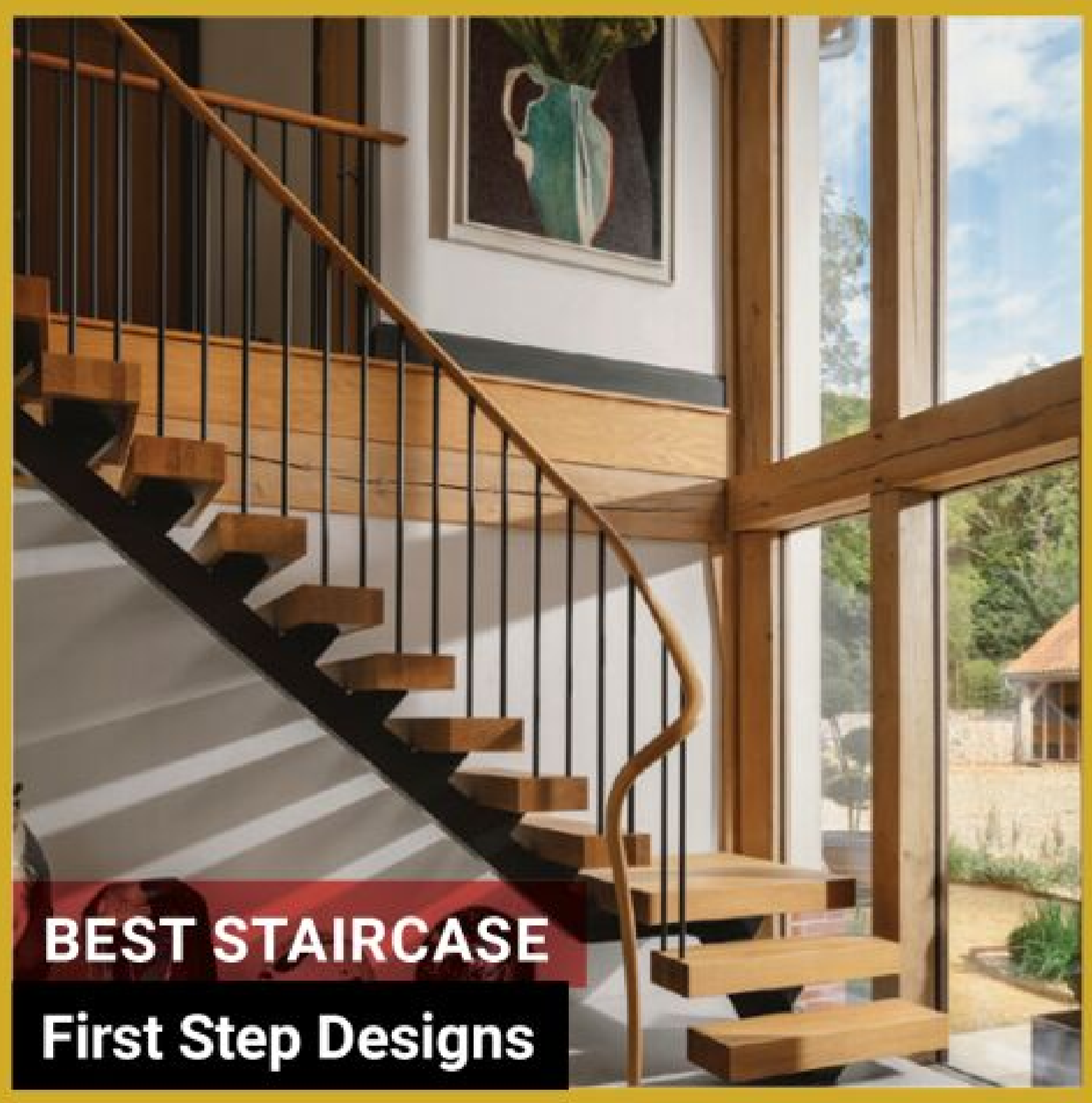
BEST TIMBER FRAME HOME
Timber Innovations

BEST ICF HOME
ARCO2 Architecture

BEST CUSTOM BUILD PROJECT
Clarendon Homes

BEST STOVE PRODUCT
Mendip Stoves


BEST SELF BUILD UNDER 300K
Scandinavian Homes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First Step Designs

BEST GLAZED DOORS
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For information on sponsoring the 2025 Build It Awards contact: **Nick Gillam on 0203 627 3245**

In Focus

Build It Live

Every month, we round up some of the UK's best products and suppliers for self builders and home renovators. Over the next few pages, we put the spotlight on what's in store at Build It Live in Bicester on 7th & 8th June

When it comes to specifying your self build, extension or home renovation project, you want to be confident that you're choosing the best materials and suppliers to match your goals and budget. And we're here to help! A trip to your nearest Build It Live show is a fantastic place to start, giving you instant access to 1,000s of high-quality products, 100s of knowledgeable suppliers and our very own magazine experts. Our next show, at Bicester Motion in Oxfordshire, opens its doors on 7th & 8th June.

Source quality products & services

From structural materials through to eco insulations, sliding doors, smart home tech and more, there's nothing quite like seeing and experiencing a product in person to understand whether it's the right fit for you.

At Build It Live, you'll see a huge range of options first-hand – and in many cases you can interact with them much like you would in a showroom. Open and close windows; slide glazed doors along their tracks; feel the quality of handmade bricks, timber claddings and other external finishes; see the latest heat pump solutions; and gain a deep insight into all the components that will go into your completed bespoke home.

Crucially, you'll get to do all of that while benefitting from the guiding hand of expert suppliers. How many opportunities do you get to speak to multiple timber frame, glazing, heating, insulation, airtightness, kitchen, staircase and flooring (the list goes on!) specialists all under one roof? At Build It Live, you can not only compare and contrast the product options, but also meet the partners you'll be working with on what's likely to be the biggest and most personal project you'll ever undertake.

These are experts in their fields and, importantly, they've worked on countless home building projects. So they've been there, done it and got the T-shirt! That means you can expect tried-and-trusted advice from experienced professionals, running the whole gamut from architects to house manufacturers, warranty providers, energy specialists, roofers, lighting suppliers and more!

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7th & 8th June 2025 at **Bicester Motion, Oxfordshire**

See page 34 to claim your 2 FREE TICKETS or find out more at www.builditlive.co.uk

Don't Ignore Your Upstairs Floor

It's very common to hear horror stories of living with a timber upstairs floor. From the kids creating havoc and sounding like they are about to bring down the whole ceiling to having that squeaking and creaking noise waking you up in the dead of night as someone goes to the toilet. This is because wood floors shrink and have little acoustic value.

By using Lewis Deck and a thin screed, floating on top of timber joists, this removes these issues and by adding in underfloor heating pipes, with no added floor thickness, you get an efficient heating system giving you the best upstairs floor possible.

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Innovative Construction Materials Ltd

Tel: 01388 728833 **Web:** www.cdi-icm.co.uk

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Your home should do more than provide shelter and be energy efficient. If designed correctly it'll be a far more healthy and comfortable environment to live in. With energy costs rising and environmental concerns growing, implementing energy efficient home solutions isn't just a smart decision - it's an essential one. From sourcing the finest quality products to providing expert guidance at every stage of the project, we ensure every detail contributes to the creation of a truly life changing home. 21 Degrees is your trusted partner in creating buildings that not only meet the highest standards of energy efficiency but also provide unparalleled comfort, health, and long-term value.

21°

Tel: 01484 461705 **Web:** www.21degrees.com

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FAKRO brings intelligent design to every corner of your home. Our roof windows are crafted with handles at the bottom of the sash, allowing higher installation for increased daylight and privacy. The V40P automatic air inlet regulates fresh air flow while helping conserve heat. For added peace of mind, our topSafe system delivers advanced anti-burglary protection. And when it comes to loft access, our ladders are a benchmark for safety and reliability. From product to support, experience the difference expertise makes.

BETTER FIT A FAKRO

Tel: 01283 554755 **Web:** www.fakro.co.uk

Designing buildings that are thoughtful, practical, sustainable and beautiful

With expertise in Passivhaus and sustainability, Gresford Architects prioritise beautiful, considered design alongside energy efficiency and thermal performance in creating all our projects. Our portfolio spans from ultra-low energy new build houses to thoughtfully crafted small extensions and includes a wealth of experience working with listed buildings. Each project reflects our team's passion for sustainability and craftsmanship, and we are committed to striking the perfect balance between the poetic and the practical, whilst recognising the impact of our approach on our wider built landscape and cultural heritage. We take particular pride in fostering collaborative relationships with our clients, consultants and contractors. No project can be truly successful without a team approach, with mutual respect and understanding between all the key roles.

Tel: 01865 360 037 **Web:** www.gresfordarchitects.co.uk

Lacuna folding doors: Danish design with German engineering

Lacuna
of DENMARK

The Danish Lacuna bifolds blur the boundaries between inside and out. When open, it's like sitting outside – but you're sheltered from the sun and drizzle. In winter, protected by the glass panels, you still have the full pleasure of those garden vistas.

Lacuna supplies a durable, dimensionally stable door in Danish design – with unrivalled U-values and airtightness.

Let the light in and let Lacuna help you to attain even passivhaus performance on your project.

Tel: 03300 010552 **Web:** www.lacuna-bifold.co.uk

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For discerning homeowners who refuse to compromise, Norrsken's entrance doors blend sustainable luxury with thermal excellence. Each precision-engineered door combines reassuring solidity with effortless operation–crafted from sustainably sourced timber with optional aluminum cladding. Create a statement entrance that reflects your commitment to quality while maintaining consistent comfort in your sanctuary, whatever the weather brings.

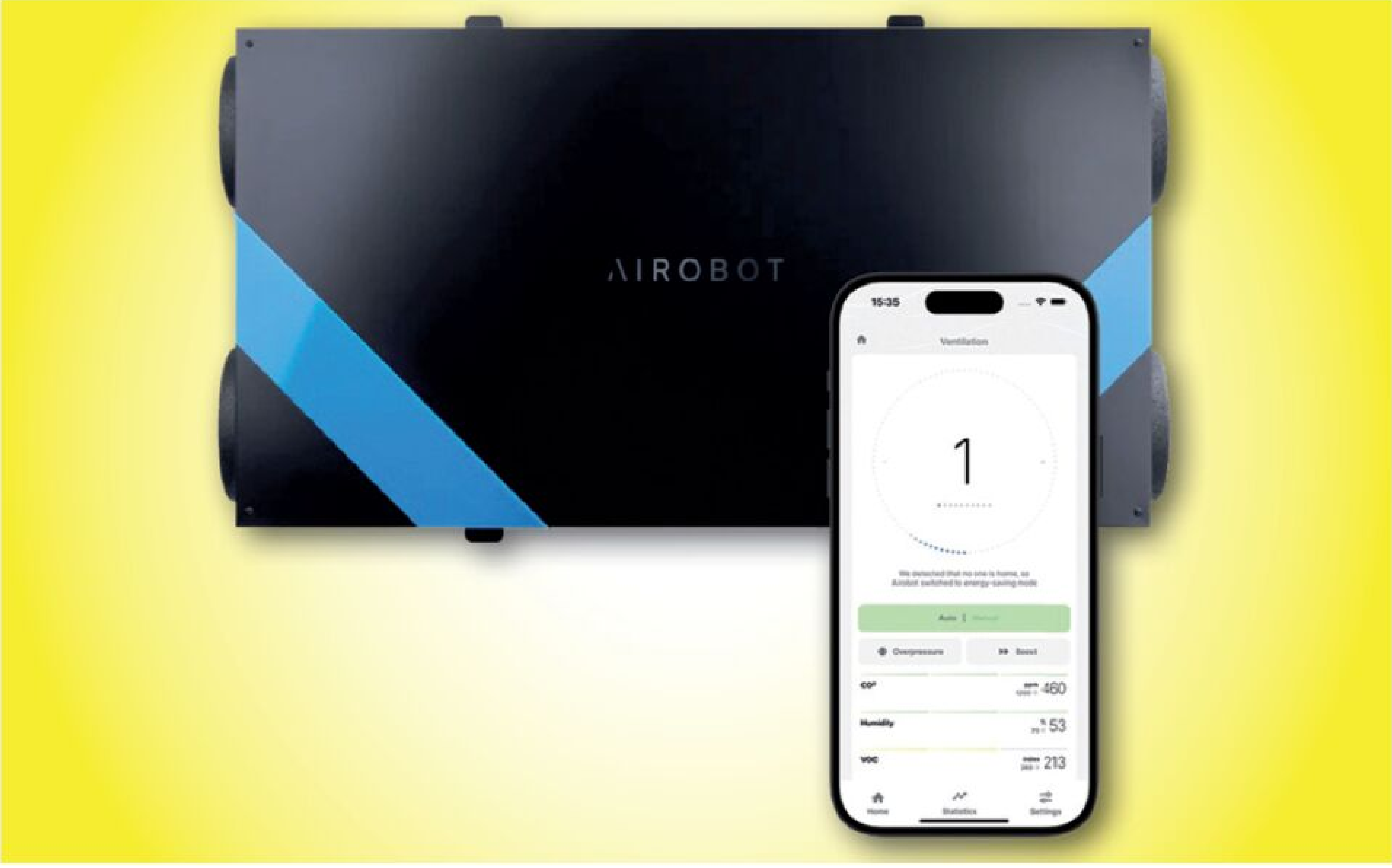
Tel: 01202 632777 **Web:** www.norrsken.co.uk

Site Insurance and Structural Warranty for your Project

When you invest time, effort and money into making your dream home a reality, you should protect it from day one. At Self-Build Zone, we've been insuring self-builds, renovations, conversions, extensions and more since 2002. We understand the hard work you put in, so our market-leading and award-winning cover is built to meet your needs.

Site Insurance protects you throughout construction – including any existing structures, employees, traders, theft, public liability and more – for all types of build, and periods of cover from three months to twenty four. If you're starting from scratch, our 10 year Structural Warranty is approved by the majority of mortgage lenders in the UK and backed by 'A' Rated insurers, so you have the confidence you can sell. Get a quote online or call us today.

Tel: 0345 230 9874 **Web:** www.selfbuildzone.com



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Tel: 01403 563045 **Web:** www.mvhr.mu

Build smart. Live efficiently.

Looking for a sustainable smart home solution that's simple to install and effortless to use? LUXORliving by Theben is your eco-conscious answer. Designed to help you reduce energy consumption without compromising comfort, LUXORliving puts intuitive lighting, heating, and shading control at your fingertips. No cloud dependency. No unnecessary complexity. Just straightforward smart home control that supports a more energy-efficient way of living. Whether you're building your dream home or retrofitting, LUXORliving makes it easy to future-proof your space with sustainability in mind.

Tel: 01237 751546 **Web:** www.luxorliving.co.uk

Transform your home with timber cladding from Vastern Timber

Discover the perfect blend of quality and versatility at Vastern Timber, your go-to destination for locally-grown timber cladding. Our extensive selection includes larch, cedar, and Brimstone, catering to both trade professionals and DIY enthusiasts. Elevate your project with timber cladding that seamlessly adapts to contemporary or rustic design styles, enhancing the aesthetic of any building.

Navigating the multitude of options available can be daunting, but fear not – at Vastern Timber, we bring years of experience and expertise to guide you. Thousands have trusted us to assist in choosing the ideal timber cladding for their projects. Let our team help you navigate through the choices, ensuring that you not only stay within budget but also achieve the perfect blend of style and functionality.

Tel: 01793 853281 **Web:** www.vastern.co.uk

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Tel: 01767 600499 **Web:** www.rega-uk.com

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Our unique tile portfolios are packed with beautiful luxury tiles. These are the latest tantalising Italian and Spanish designs, hand-picked by us, making it easy for you to create show-stopping walls and floors in your home, garden or business. You will find the very latest designer styles, surprisingly affordable prices and uncompromised quality – all backed by a highly flexible, personal service designed to make tile shopping a joy.

As an independent business, we love what we do and put all our energies into delivering friendly service with every tile purchase – no matter how large or small. We've been described as 'highly recommended' and 'an absolute gem' by our clients and whether you shop with us online or visit our showroom, you will find exquisite tiles at great prices.

Our tile portfolios are jam-packed with porcelain tiles for the bathroom, kitchen and living areas, stunning large format tiles, 2cm porcelain outdoor pavers, as well as a whole host of gorgeous patterned and feature tiles too. You will also find an extensive selection of inside outside porcelain tiles making it easy to connect indoor spaces with outdoor spaces with tiles that co-ordinate for home and garden.

In addition, we offer up to 6 free samples, a larger sample service, volume rewards – so the more you buy the better your discount – and up to 8 weeks free of charge storage for your chosen tiles with our hugely popular 'Order & Store' service. Every day, across the UK, our thriving independent business is helping customers find the tiles they love so start exploring our tile portfolios today!

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Web: www.thetileportfolio.co.uk

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Ultimate Renewables Supplies, the leading specialist in Design & Supply of renewable energy solutions. Whether you're looking for heat pumps, solar PV, battery storage, underfloor heating or MVHR, they provide only the best equipment to optimise the performance and efficiency of homeowners' systems. In addition to supplying cutting-edge renewable technology from top manufacturers, they provide essential training for installers to become part of their Accredited Installer network. Plus, their MCS Umbrella Scheme covers the entire scope of works including the £7500 BUS Grant application. This strategy empowers homeowners to confidently embrace energy-efficient solutions, fostering greener and more sustainable living spaces

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Tel: 01869 929042 **Web:** www.ultimaterenewables.com

Don't let a loss shatter your finances. Get it covered it with Protek

Whether you are building an extension, renovating a home, or building from scratch, a loss can literally stop you in your tracks. Theft, storm damage, break-ins or an injury on site all involve delays and additional costs. Don't just assume your builder's policy will protect you, because they are likely to only have Public Liability.

Changes in the Defective Premises Act have far reaching consequence for anyone building or renovating. As of June 2022, the new limitation periods for claims being made against you were increased to 15 years regarding works completed after 28 June 2022.

This is why having a 10-year structural warranty is so important. Professional consultant certificates do not give you anywhere near the level of protection you require.

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Value engineering worth talking about

Gapotape is a revolutionary new insulation product that has been specifically designed to eliminate the performance gap and form a thermal seal around the edges of rigid insulation panels in floors, roofs and walls. Up until now, rigid insulation has been impossible to install between rafters, studs and joists without airgaps as even the most meticulous installations suffer from inevitable shrinkage, warping and movement of timber elements. This means that the 'as built' U-value of rigid insulation is much less than its 'as specified' U-value. This 'performance gap' is one of the biggest issues in the construction sector and is a problem for almost all insulation types, most of which have no remedy. One of the main aims of the amended Part L building regulations is to build the knowledge and expertise to deliver net zero carbon homes. While the new Part L amendments relate to new dwellings, the general principles are relevant to all building types so don't be afraid to insist on the same standard. Gapotape offers the first holistic non-permeable insulation solution to eliminate the performance gap.

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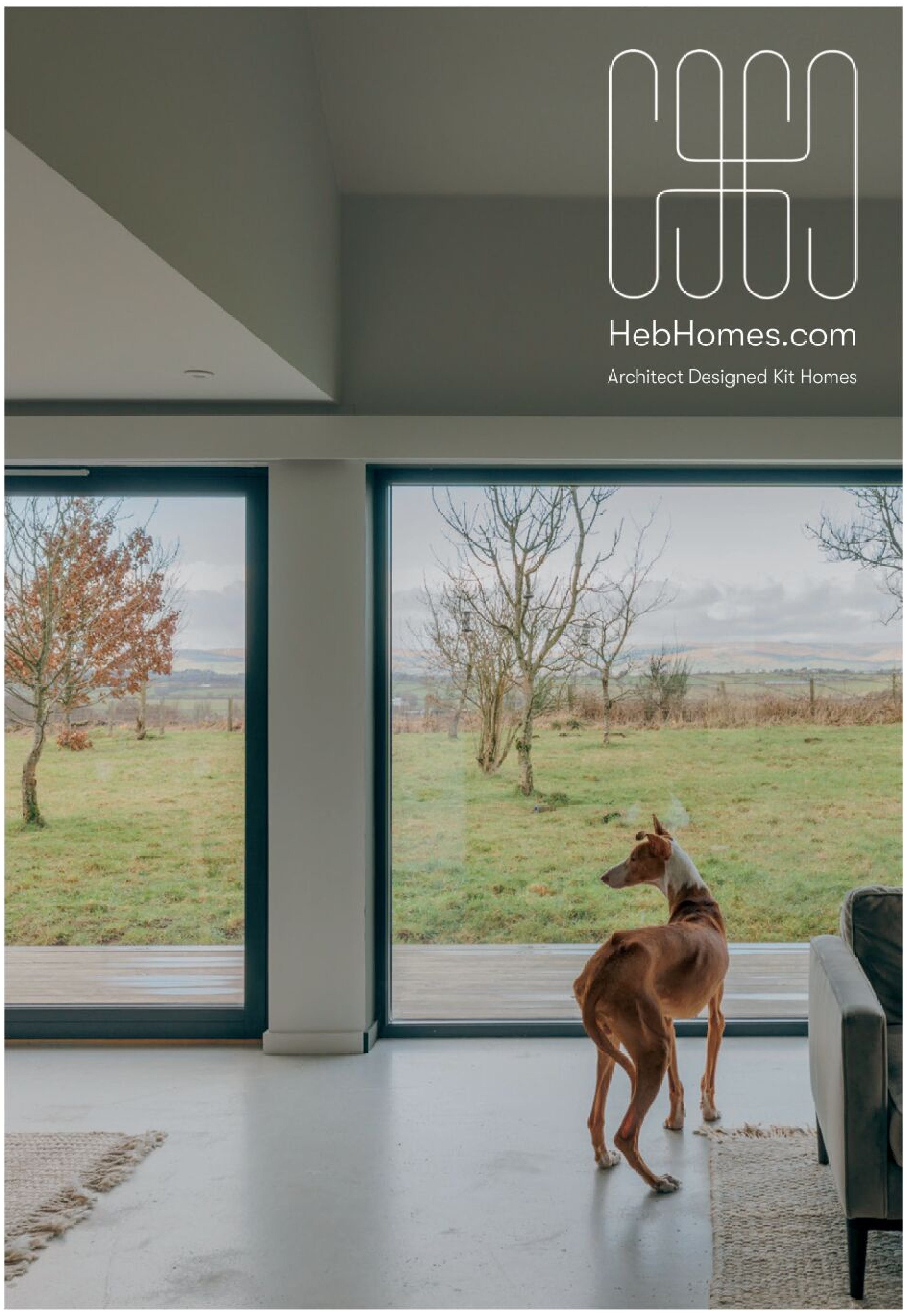

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Boat house renovation benefits from "intuitive" A. Proctor Group membranes

A former fishing bothy on the Carnoustie coast is being transformed into a beach house by retired chemical engineer David Gibson. The project uses two different membrane products from the A. Proctor Group: Facadeshield UV and Proctor Air.

The narrow site (3.5m x 8m) meant David retained the original sleeper foundations, reducing the existing brick walls to one metre and constructing a timber frame above. Initially planning open-jointed cladding, he selected Facadeshield UV for its UV resistance, vapour permeability, and water resistance. Left exposed for three months, it effectively protected the OSB sheathing during construction delays.

For the roof, David chose Proctor Air, an air permeable, low resistance (APLR) membrane ideal beneath a traditional slate finish. Its ability to ventilate the roof space and remove any risk of condensation made it particularly suitable for the building's exposed coastal location and monopitch roof design. David praised the installation process as "intuitive," though he did enlist help with the roof membrane installation.

Proctor Group

Tel 01250 872 261 **Web** www.proctorgroup.com

Featured on pages 28-36

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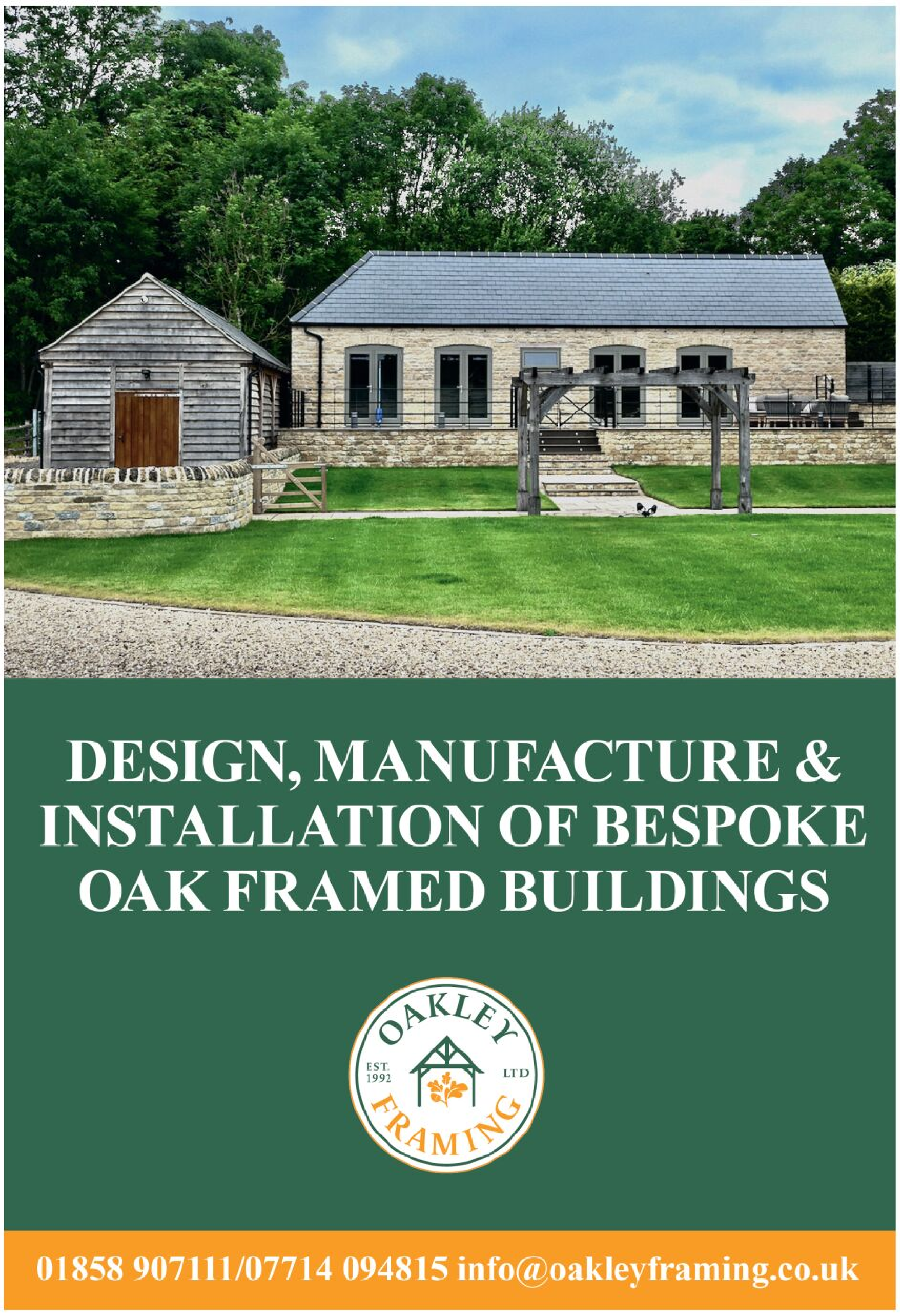
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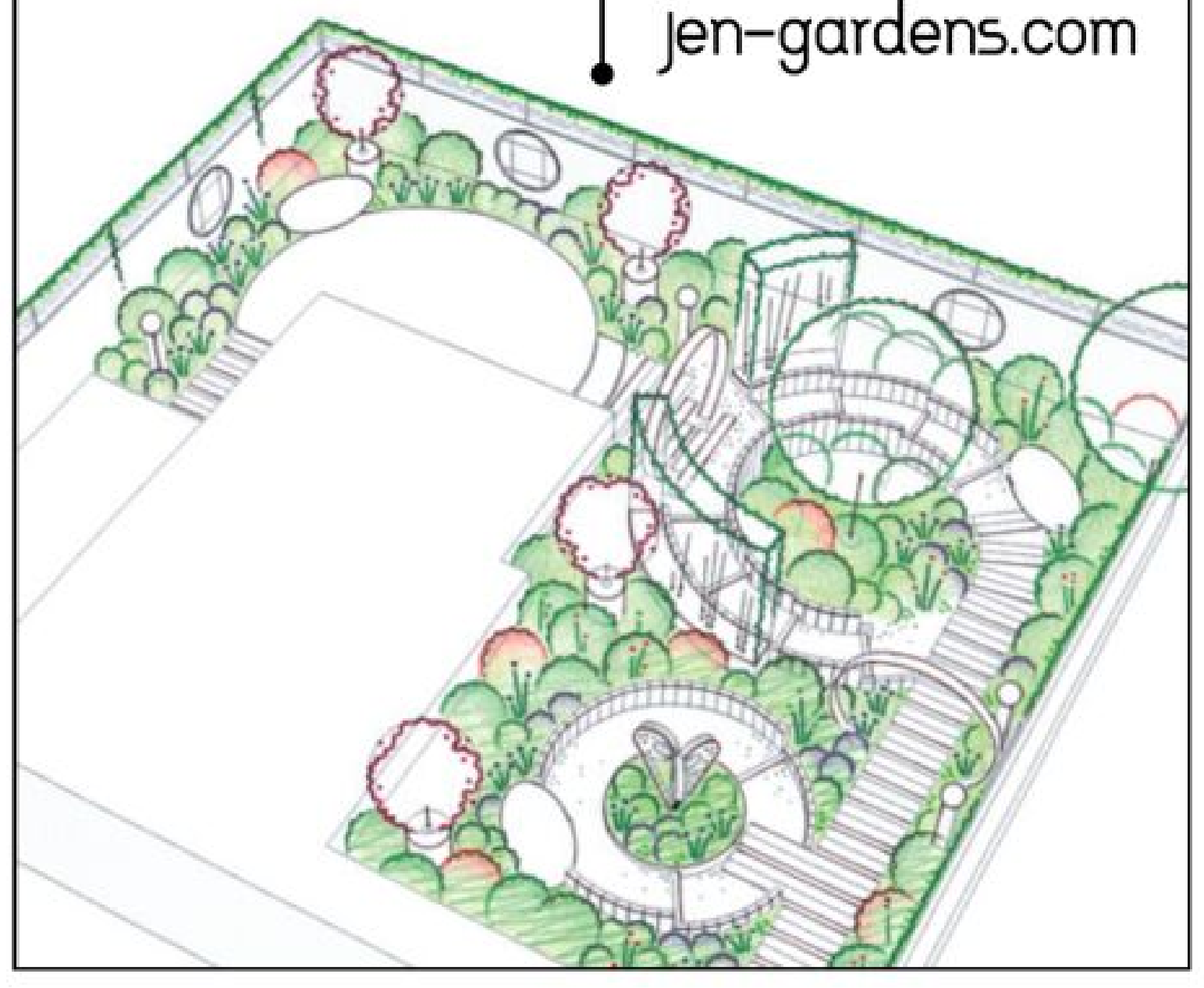

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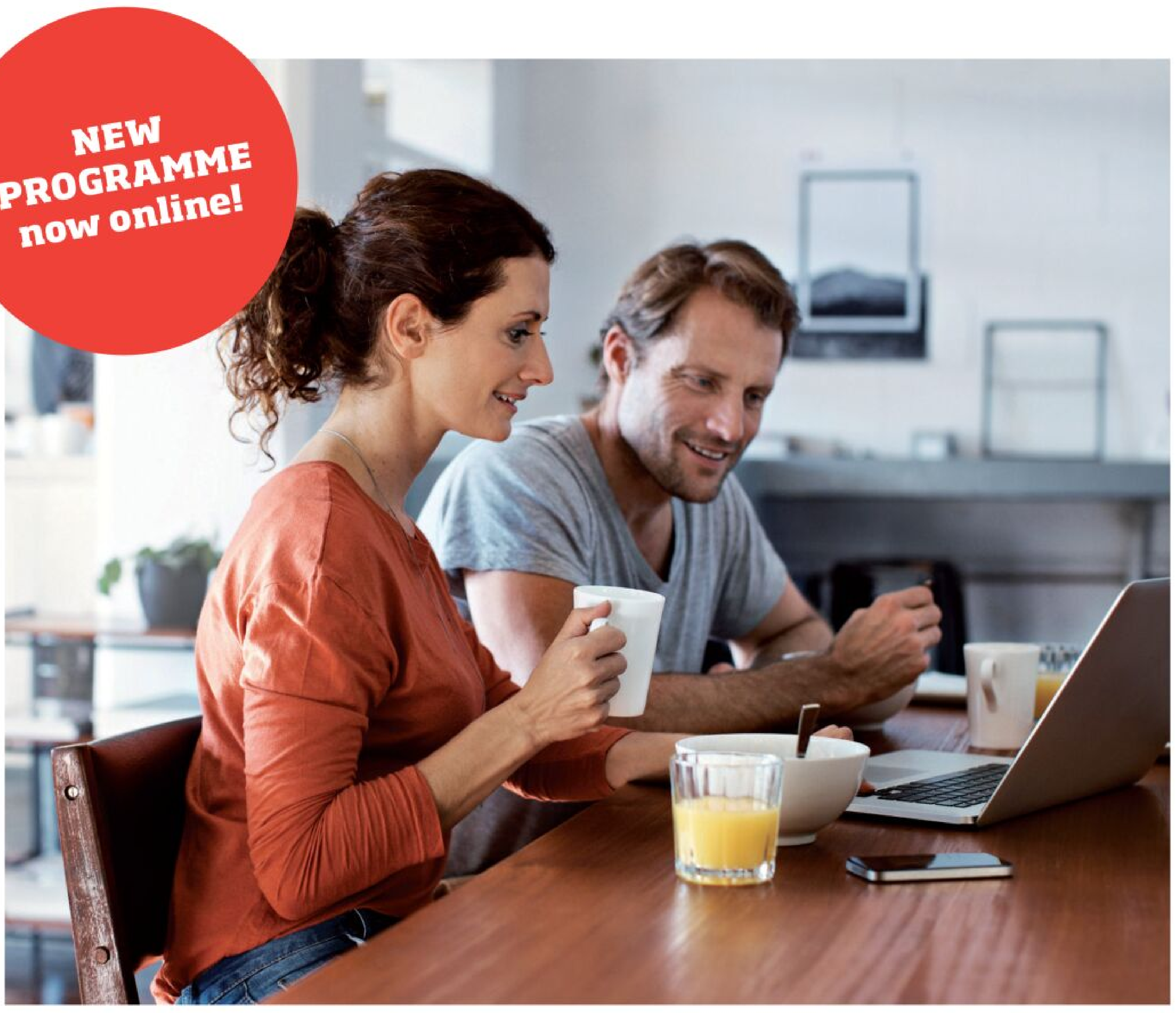

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ARCHITECT'S VIEW

Mark Siddall, architect and Passivhaus designer at LEAP, shares the key considerations for achieving a low-energy standard for existing properties

Creating an EnerPHit certified home

What is EnerPHit?

This is the world's leading quality assurance standard for retrofitting buildings to reduce their energy use. It grew out of the well-know Passivhaus standard which encourages people to create highly energy-efficient new buildings. As it is harder to get many existing buildings to deliver the same performance as new builds, in 2010 the EnerPHit standard was introduced to provide a slightly more realistic set of goals for efficient renovation strategies.

How can someone go about achieving this low-energy standard?

There are two principal methods. The first is to target the space heating demand. This is where there are set values you need to achieve to meet the EnerPHit standard. This approach focuses on limiting the annual energy used to heat the building, measured in kilowatt-hours per m² of internal floor area (kWh/m².yr).

Specific target values must be met to comply with the EnerPHit criteria. These performance criteria are determined by the climate zone. In the UK there are two climate zones 25 kWh/m².yr to 30 kWh/m².yr. Most homes fall within the least demanding bracket. However, this method can be challenging for many existing homes, particularly those with complex shapes and forms, as the additional surface area arising from irregular shapes often increases the difficulty of reducing energy demand to the required level.

Alternatively, a component method can be used. This specifies the thermal performance of individual opaque and transparent building elements – such as walls, windows, doors, roofs and floors. The thermal performance of these elements is determined by their U-value (a measure of thermal transmittance). Lower U-values indicate better insulation and slower heat loss. This route offers more flexibility, especially for properties with complex shapes and forms – which allows the retrofit to be tailored to improve overall efficiency. In addition, the EnerPHit standard has performance criteria for ventilation including fresh air supply, noise, fan power and the efficiency of the heat recovery unit.

If you're aiming to integrate renewable energy systems and maximise efficiency through building fabric improvements, the space heating demand method may be more suitable. On the other hand, if you'd prefer an adaptable strategy that works with your home's existing form, the component method could be better.

A finalist in the 2023 UK Passivhaus Awards in the residential retrofit category, this home by Mark Siddall at LEAP uses a timber frame structure inside the original stone barn. The build is the North East's first certified EnerPHit project, with an airtightness of 0.18 ACH @50Pa

What are the main challenges when striving for an accredited retrofit?

As with any project, managing a budget is often the primary challenge. Fortunately, EnerPHit offers flexibility through two certification pathways: a comprehensive approach or a step-by-step method. With the step-by-step route, you can complete the design and implement initial measures to meet a clear benchmark.

Once a significant improvement is achieved, you can obtain certification for your progress. From there, you can continue the retrofit at your own pace, depending on time and budget, with periodic reviews by a certified assessor to ensure you stay on track.

Another problem retrofitters face is lacking a defined plan from the outset. Whether considering an extension or refurbishment, it's essential to understand how these elements interact – even if you aren't doing them all at once. For example, if you build an extension using cavity wall and later apply external insulation to the rest of the house, significant thermal bridging may occur at the junction. This makes meeting EnerPHit standards harder and more expensive, especially if previous work needs to be altered or redone.

Why might someone choose to live in an EnerPHit certified home?

Upgrading your home offers a wide range of benefits beyond improved energy efficiency and reduced heating and cooling costs.

One of the most significant advantages is enhanced thermal comfort. The measures eliminate draughts and raise surface temperatures, creating a more comfortable internal climate. Indoor air quality is also improved, especially with a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery (MVHR) system. This delivers a constant supply of fresh, filtered air, reducing humidity and promoting a healthier living environment. By controlling moisture, it also helps prevent condensation, mould growth and structural damage.

Additionally, the increased airtightness of an EnerPHit-standard home significantly reduces noise pollution. A well-sealed building envelope will act as a barrier to any external noise, ensuring a quieter, more peaceful indoor atmosphere.

Mark Siddall is the director of architecture, research and consultancy at LEAP. With over 30 years' industry experience, Mark is one of the UK's leading Passivhaus experts and has over 17 years' experience researching and delivering low energy and low carbon buildings, including completing 31 certified passivhaus buildings, several of which have won a UK Passivhaus Award. For more information call **01913 757702** or visit **www.leap4.it**

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